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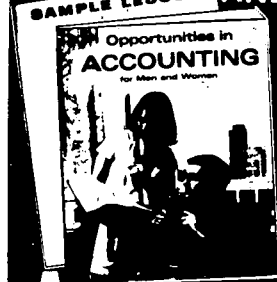

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THE BIG 24th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

DECEMBER, 1975 **Vol. 25, No. 1**

new novelets
THE CHURCH OF SAINT SATAN AND PANDAEMONS
by AVRAM DAVIDSON 6
LYDECTES: ON THE NATURE OF SPORTS
by GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER 48
SISYPHUS, SON OF AEOLUS
by VSEVOLOD IVANOV (translated by JOHN W. ANDREWS) 58

new sword & sorcery novelet
THE CITY IN THE JEWEL
by LIN CARTER 22

new short stories
THE THING DOWN HALLWAY 9
by BARRY N. MALZBERG 71
THE PURVESS INCIDENT
by JAMES LINCOLN WARREN 76
THE FLYER
by COLIN SAXTON 82
THE PI-A-SAW BIRD
by RICHARD STOOKER 88
PANDORA'S CRYOGENIC BOX
by FELIX C. GOTSCHALK 96
THE STRANGE CASE OF THE BIRDS
by DAVID R. BUNCH 104

new features
EDITORIAL **by TED WHITE** 4
Literary Swordmen & Sorcerers
THE ARCHITECT OF CAMELOT
by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP 108
FANTASY BOOKS
by FRITZ LEIBER 118
ACCORDING TO YOU 125

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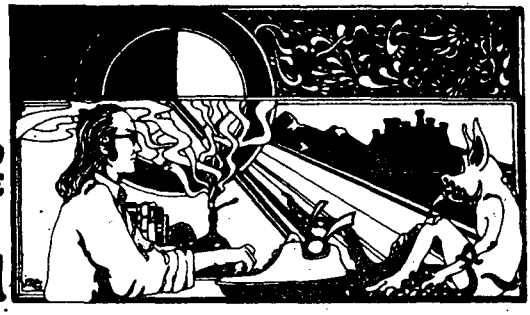
TED WHITE

editorial



WHAT IS FANTASY? WHAT IS REALITY? This magazine, as its title proclaims, is a fantasy magazine. The fiction we present here is fantasy. But what *is* fantasy? A genre of fiction? All that is not "real"?

My dictionary attacks the question this way: "1. The realm of vivid imagination, reverie, depiction, illusion, and the like; the natural conjurings of mental invention and association; the visionary world; make-believe. 2. A mental image, especially a disordered and weird image; an illusion; phantasm. 3. A capricious or whimsical idea or notion; conceit. 4. *a.* Literary or dramatic fiction characterized by highly fanciful or supernatural elements. *b.* An example of such fiction. 5. *Psychology.* An imagined event of condition fulfilling a wish. 6. *Music.* A fantasia. —See Synonyms at *imagination.*"

In terms of the fiction we publish, definition 4 is obviously the most appropriate. But "fantasy" as a word has wider connotations—as can be found in the other definitions—and all of these connotations are upon occasion appropriate to the material we publish here.

We live in a material-oriented society, one which at least overtly rejects fantasy. Our society is the descendant of the philosophizing of the Greeks, of whom Plato and Socrates are best remembered. That philosophizing, in which attempts were made to define reality—to break it down into classifiable parts and to then order those parts—lead more or less directly to today's highly technological civilization. Ours is a world of *things.* We agree on the need for objectifying these *things* in order to manipulate them: science is nothing more or less than the objectification of our observable universe.

There is nothing in itself objectionable in this. By coming to "understand" objects, we can more or less successfully manipulate them. We "understand" these objects less by any true comprehension of their nature and properties and relationships with other things than by classifying and labelling them. The more genuine "understanding" is considered esoteric knowledge and entrusted to those who have received special training in narrow areas—to whom we defer. The automobile is an good an example of this as anything. Most people understand only the basic functions of the entire automobile and trust its servicing and repair to those who are presumed to understand it better. But the automobile is a *collection* of things —parts—each of which has its own

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function and capabilities, and all too many of which are "understood" by mechanics only on the level of "Your framis is worn out; I'll put in a new one."

I have three refrigerators in my house. One is an ancient Frigidaire, built sometime in the middle 1930's; it was the original refrigerator in this house and survives to this day because it continues to be useful. The second is a refrigerator I bought used for $15.00 and keep in my basement, in which I store apples most of the winter. The third, a fancy job which theoretically periodically defrosts itself, is in the pantry and serves as the "main" refrigerator—the one to which one goes for regular items one needs in the kitchen.

For a number of years the ancient refrigerator has required special attention when closing its door—a spring was broken in the latching mechanism, which, I was told, was impossible to replace. "They stopped making parts for that refrigerator years ago," is the way it was explained to me. The parts are esoteric, you see. So I used it largely for storage—so that I didn't have to manipulate the latch too frequently.

The main refrigerator has been acting peculiar for more than a year now. When running properly it should cycle through cooling and defrosting modes once or twice a day, so that the ice which forms on the exposed coils can melt off and run down to a tray underneath. This cycle began to occur more erratically over the last year. Quite often the defrost cycle would not occur at all, allowing massive amounts of ice to build up, and freezing delicate produce like lettuce. Then the machine would cease functioning entirely for several hours to a day, allowing all the ice to melt before restarting the cooling cycle. As I write this summer is in full force here, and the last week and a half have been excessively humid—thundershowers every day and humidity in the 80% range. Sometime last week the refrigerator quite cooling and after the ice melted still failed to restart itself—despite the frequent starting-up noises it would make every few minutes.

I moved everything to the much older refrigerator. But that tricky broken latch was now a more serious problem. It made getting the smallest thing out or putting it back a major operation. It meant my nearly-five-year-old daughter couldn't go to the "fridge" every so often for a glass of milk—she couldn't manipulate the latch successfully. Yesterday, in disgust, I removed the latching mechanism and took it down to my basement shop. There I knocked out the rivet on which the handle pivotted, removed the interior of the mechanism, and found behind it a short compression-spring which had broken in two places and could no longer do its job. The spring no doubt was made in the middle 1930's, along with the rest of the refrigerator. I took the spring to a local hardwear store, where I found an assortment of springs on display. I compared it with those on display and found one almost exactly the same size. It came in a plastic bag with a second, identical, spring; the pair cost 44¢. I installed the new spring, reassembled the latch, drove the rivet back in, and put the latch back on the refrigerator door. It works fine.

I could have done this any time in the last five years.

I didn't solely because I imagined that the refrigerator service man who had said the part was obsolete was

(cont. on page 122)

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Fresh from solving "The Case of the Mother-In-Law-Of-Pearl" (last issue), Doctor Eszterhazy returns to deal with an even more puzzling problem—

THE CHURCH OF SAINT SATAN AND PANDAEMONS

AVRAM DAVIDSON

"HAVE YOU SEEN THIS, Englebert?" asked Judge Baltazaro Gumperts, tapping the newspaper—one of a dozen or two provided daily by the thoughtful proprietors of the Crown's-head Coffee House.

"What is that—the *Gazette*?—haven't seen it today."

The jurist, with a sound half-snort and half-chuckle, said, "Did you know there is a woman newpaper editor in the American province of Far-vest?"

"I did not know, and am not surprised."

"Incredible province."

The judge sucked in coffee, shook his head.

"What about it?—and her?"

Judge Gumperts smacked the newspaper, perhaps as much to reprove it as to straighten it out for easier reading. "She says that the farmers there should raise less corn and more Hell; fact: just what it says: 'Raise less corn and more Hell'—what do you think it *means*?"

Doctor Engelbert Eszterhazy watched the waiter pour boiling milk into his cup from one vessel and hot coffee into it from another, with simultaneous dexterity: half and half. "Why. . . . I suspect that it is an invitation to the always-embattled farmers of America to devote fewer energies to the cultivation of maize in order that more emergies may be devoted politico-economic agitations." He observed the milk forming a skin, nodded his satsifaction. The waiter withdrew. Ezsterhazy raised the glass, held it a moment as he followed a thought. "Something to do with railroad rates, I seem to recall. Our railroads are owned by The Crown, but as there is no Crown in America, the railroads there are owned by what are called *investors*." He bent his head and sipped.

Judge Gumperts said, "Ahaah!"

"What 'ahaah!' "

And the member of the Court of the Second Jurisdiction said that this was perhaps why the American railroads sometimes imported quantitities of peasants from the Triune Monarchy. "Of the odder sort, too. Give

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

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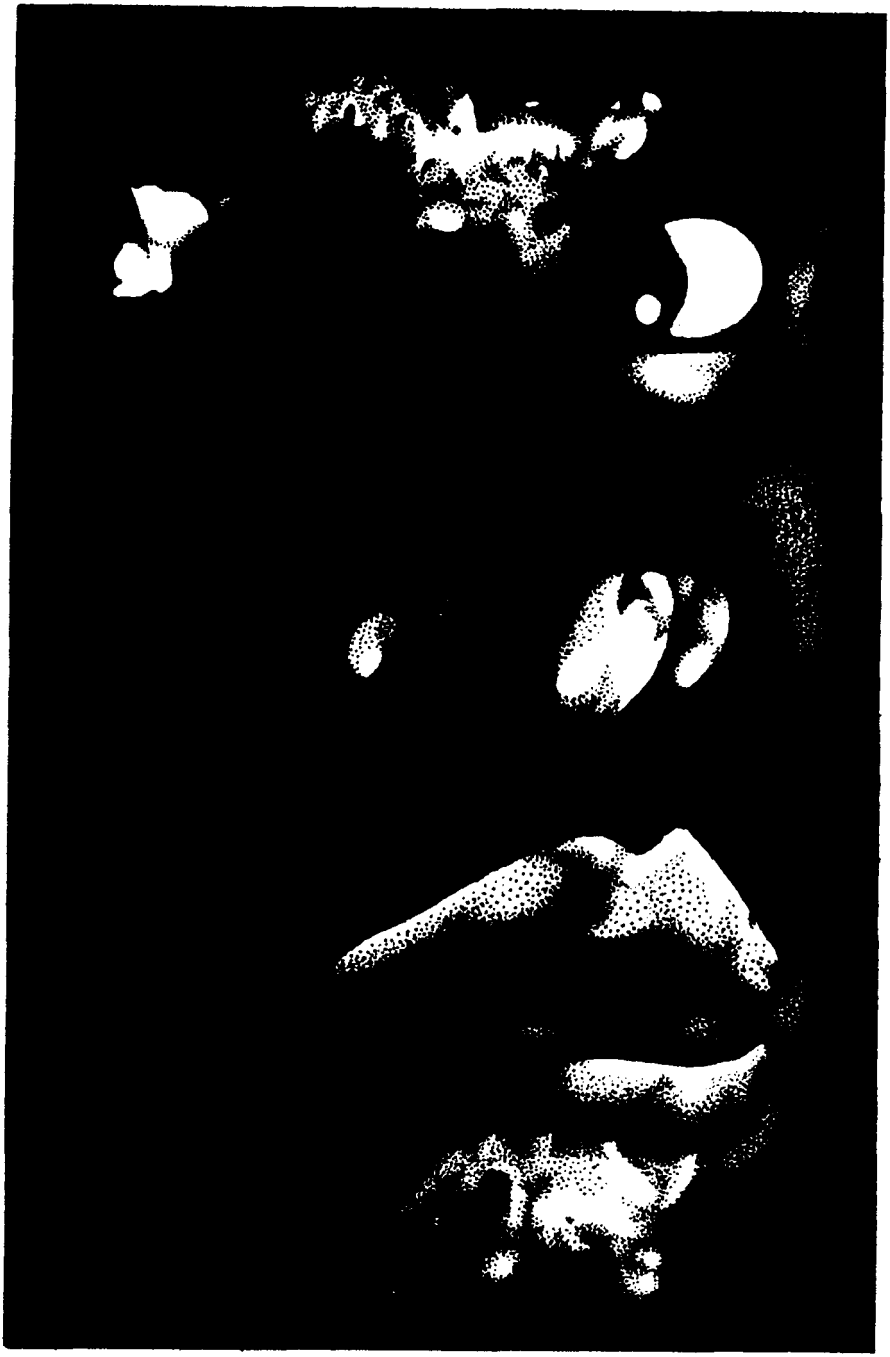

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them free land, and all. Which ones was it? Those odd chaps who wouldn't vote or do military service, oh yes: Mennonites. *They* won't make politio-economic agitations, I am sure. All *kinds* of different religions they have there in America, Engelbert. Fact. Read it in the *Gazette*. All privately-owned, too: like their railroads. All equal, too, you know. Fact. No State Church and no Concordats, you know. And women can be editors, too, it seems. Well, they can *vote* there, you know, in the Province of Far-vest." Once more he sipped, licked his moustaches. "In-*cred*-ible," he said.

ON THAT SAME MORNING in the late Spring, Count Vladeck, the Minister of Cults to the Triune Monarchy of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, was laying out a game of patience on his inlaid ebony desk, when a soft double-knock followed by an equally soft cough announced the presence of Brno, the Ministry's Principal Secretary.

"Come in, Most Worthy Servant," the Minister said, his eyebrows raising slightly in surprise. Brno, a stickler for ceremony in all its most antique forms, did not usually call upon his superior without having previously sent a note beginning *Exceedingly August and High-born*, and concluding, *Kissing thus the Feet*, and so on. Count Vladeck, accordingly, did not merely look up from the cards, he laid them down entirely.

Entered Brno, tall, thin, clad in black, pale as wax: the perfect civil servant, treading almost upon his toes. With lips compressed, he laid upon the Minister's desk a document headed, in very large letters, and in the Gothic, Glagolitic, and Latin alphabets PERMISSION FOR THE LAWFUL RECOGNITION OF THE CONVENTICLE HEREUNDER DESCRIBED. Count Vladeck did not exactly wince, he did not exactly make a mow, certainly he did not grind his teeth: but his teeth did indeed meet with a perceptible click. And Brno, with a certain air which combined satisfaction and gloom, said, "Exactly so, Exceedingly August and High-born Lord Minister and Count."

If the conventicle (thereunder described) had been a congregation of the Holy Orthodox Church, no such permission need have been sought of the Ministry of Cults, such matters being purely the concern of the Metropolitans of Pannonia and Scythia, and/or the Holy Synod of Transbalkania. If it had been a Roman Catholic or Greek Catholic matter, the preliminary documentation would have been handled by the Papal Delegate, with the advice and consent of the Primus of Pannonia or the Ethnarch of Scythia or the Byzantine Exilarch of Balkania. And, inasmuch as Count Vladeck had received neither a preliminary visit from the Chief Rabbi nor a box of musk from the Grand Hodja, clearly no newly-planned synagogue or mosque was involved.

More—and on arriving at this point in his cogitations, the Minister of Cults sighed and reached for his snuffbox—More: if it were merely a matter of a new Lutheran or Reformed church congregation, not only would Brno not have come to consult with Count Vladeck, the Regional Secretaries of the Ministry would not have bothered bringing the matter to the attention of Brno.

All of which added up the prospect of another Evangelical Dissenting Group. And from that point on, there was really no knowing.

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The last time this had occurred there were riots in Cisbalkania, the Byzantine delegates in the Diet had voted against the Budget, the Hyperboreans had refused to pay their head-tax, and the Papal Delegate, Monsignor Pinocchio, pleading severe indisposition, cancelled the twice-monthly sessions at which he and Count Vladeck (plus Field Marshal Dracúla-Hunyadi and Professor Plotz of the Medical Faculty) played poker—a game which Monsignor Pinocchio had learned as a parish priest in Bruklin, a provincial city on Great Island in the American Province of Nev-Jork.

All most disturbing, of course.

Count Vladeck took snuff rather gloomily.

"Which is it this time, Brno?" he asked, with a sigh and a snuffle. "The Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists? Or the Seventh Day Antinomians?"

Brno pointed without words to the line reading, NAME OF THE CONVENTICLE FOR WHICH LAWFUL RECOGNITION IS SOUGHT, and upon which, in a neat and clear hand indicating nothing of any of the emotions which the copying clerk might have been supposed to have felt, was written *The Church of St. Satan and Pandaemons.*

It was Brno who broke the silence, although it was the Count who twitched convulsively. "The Petition," he said, as softly as usual, "is signed by the requisite Nineteen Respectable and Loyal Subjects, all of whom were registered in the last Census, all of whom have paid head-tax for the previous five years, all of whom have performed military service, and none of whom have ever been placed under arrest. The requisite engrossing-fee has been paid, and in gold, and so has the stamp-tax on the receipt for one year's rent of the premises designated for worship."

All, in short, was in order, perfectly in order. There was no lawful ground for the Minister of Cults to refuse his seal and signature. And, of course, if he were to apply them, the results . . . . the results—

"I shall resign," he said, in a broken voice. "Resign—and take up my duties as Master of the Boarhounds in the remote border province of Ptush, as one is automatically obliged to do after resigning without having been requested to do so by The Throne. Resign . . . and give up my cosy little ten-room flat on the Corso, my so amiable plump mistress who sings coloratura soprano in the Opera, my electrical landau, my membership in the Jockey-Sport Club, and my English manservant . . ." He thrust his knuckles into his mouth to prevent a sob escaping. It was impossible even to think of adequately heating a single room in Schloss Ptush, and the Minister was a martyr to chilblains.

Brno, to his superior's infinite surprise, said, softly but firmly, "The Exceedingly August and High-born Lord Minister and Count must do no such thing."

Hope was not yet to be thought of. But surprise alone checked the single tear which brimmed in one of Count Vladeck's eyes. "Then what must I do?" he whispered.

Said Brno: "You must consult Dr. Eszterhazy."

ENGELBERT ESZTERHAZY, Dr. Juris., Dr. Philos., Dr. Med., D. Litt., contemplated the cedar box before him. At length he opened it, extracted a panatela Caoba Granda, sniffed it, put it to his ear and did things to it and listened. Next he cut an end

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off it with a small ivory-handled knife (a gift of the late Hajji Tippoo Tibb, of Zanzibar and Pemba). Next he put that end in his mouth and the other end in a small gas-flame. He took in a puff of smoke, did things with his mouth to it; at length allowed it to dribble slowly out; took another, longer puff and kept this one in for a longer time. Then he pursed his lips and, as though scarcely aware of what he was doing, blew a smoke ring. The ring floated through the air, and settled down over the single gloved finger which protruded from the hands clasped upon the gold-topped cane of his caller.

"This is a very good Habana," he said. "This is a very difficult thing which you ask of me. You are in effect asking me to place an official *imprimatur* upon the rumors which even now already and for some years past have circulated among the more ignorant, videlicet, *'Eszterhazy trafficks with the Devil'*. Why should I do so?"

Count Vladeck blinked and removed his gaze from a richly-colored porcelain phrenological head which gave the impression of floating in mid-air about five feet equidistant from floor and ceiling. "Patriotism," he said, after a moment. And cleared his throat.

A faint movement which might have been a preliminary blink or an unfinished tic disturbed for a moment the corner of Dr. Eszterhazy's left eye, and another thin film of cigar smoke ebbed from the left corner of his mouth. He said nothing.

"*Not* patriotism?" asked Count Vladeck.

"The most patriotic man I ever met," Dr. Eszterhazy observed, "was Sergeant-Major Moomkotch, the mass-murderer. Remarkable head that man had. Remarkable. You remember Moomkotch's head, of course."

Perhaps a trifle nervously, perhaps a trifle crossly, Count Vladeck said, "No, I do *not* remember the head of Sergeant-Major Moomkotch!"

"Really?" his host said, with faint surprise. "Well, it is almost directly behind you, in a large vessel of formaldehyde." Count Vladeck, issuing a sound perhaps reminiscent of a rather large bat during the rutting season, leaped from his chair and gave the impression of trying to move two ways at the same time. Then he sat down heavily, and cast a look of cold displeasure at the man who still calmly and with placid pleasure smoked the cigar given him.

"Eszterhazy—"

"Yes, Vladeck?"

Their eyes met, locked.

After a moment: "Really, Eszterhazy, you must not allow yourself to forget that you are addressing a Royal and Imperial Minister—"

"I do not for a moment forget it, nor do I expect that a Royal and Imperial Minister will find it unreasonable that when a man has been awarded seven doctorates he be addressed by at least one of them—"

But Count Vladeck could contain himself no further. With a sound no louder than an involunatry puff, he spun about in his chair. And exclaimed, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!"

"No, no, no. Monosh Moomkitch, Sergeant-Major, First Pannonian Hussars (Star of Valor, 5th Class, Carpathian Campaign, With Bar). Convicted of seventeen counts of Infamous Murder. Went to the block singing the National Anthem. The Protuberance of Patriotism is *very* strong . . . as your Excellency can see—" He gestured with his cigar.

"Looks like a wart, to me."

Dr. Eszterhazy looked at his own

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hands, then at the back of the neatly-barbered and crisply-collared neck of his guest, moved all of his fingers once or twice, giving the impression of a spider about to spring: then sighed, very, very faintly.

"That *is* a wart, Your Excellency," he said. "The Protuberance of Patriotism is approximately four and one half centimetres to the left oblique." He placed both his hands in his pockets, and, leaning back in his chair once more, cocked up the cigar and watched the smoke.

"*Very* good Habana. . . ."

At length Count Vladeck turned. "Depressing sight," he murmured. "Yes, yes: I am sure it is also educational. Well. Enough of all this . . . this . . ." He avoided his host's eye, then he met it.

"Well, well, Doctor Eszterhazy. Well enough. You know the nature of the problem. Will you take the case?"

Another ring of cigar-smoke. Another. And another.

"Will you name your . . . your *honorarium*. . . . . Doctor Eszterhazy? Doctor Doctor Eszterhazy? Doctor Doctor Doctor Eszterhasy? Doctor Doctor Doctor Doctor Eszterhazy? Doc—"

But the host waved away any further repetition. "Those will do. The other three are honorary. 'Honorarium'? Yes. Well—" He sat up. All boredom, all mockery, all indifference, was now gone. He leaned forward.

THE MARKET-PLACE in Poposhki-Georgiou smelled like a barn—that is, assuming a barn to have born, in addition to the usual odors of hay and dung and animals, a strong scent of ripe fruit, cheap perfume, kerosene, hot grease, fried meat, and fresh-baked pastry.

A rather unlikely combination for a barn, it must be admitted. But there you are. And here *we* are. In the market-place of Poposhki-Georgiou. Tuesday, since time immemorial (that is, for the past seventeen or eighteen years), has been Little Market Day. Great Market Day is Friday. Little Market Day is largely reserved for trading in mules, oxen, and he-goats; only the men come to Little Market Day. Little Market Day *really* smells like a barn—that is, a barn in which someone has been spilling a great deal of beer and and a great deal of the cheapest quality of distilled spirit (known in the local dialect as Maiden's Breath). Few cooked or baked goods are offered on Tuesday, the men bringing their own lunch: and 'lunch,' to the peasantry of Poposki-Georgiou traditionally consists of a hunk of goat sausage, a hunk of goat cheese, a hunk of bread (not exactly black, more like grey), and a bunch of dried, sour cherries. Sour cherries are believed to be good for the lower intestine. In Poposki-Georgiou the lower intestine is regarded as the seat of the deeper emotions. "When my best mule broke his left foreleg," one might hear it said, "it felt like a Turkish knife in my lower intestine."

Also, they tell this story:

First Peasant: Yesterday I came home and found my wife in bed with the goat-herd-boy.

Second Peasant: What did you do?

First Peasant: I ate some sour cherries.

On hearing this story, particularly after the first half of the second bottle of Maiden's Breath, your Poposhki-Georgiou peasant will clutch at his embroidered vest with both hands, wet his knee-breeches, fall into spasms, and roll into dung-heaps.

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But on Friday there comes to town not only the peasant, but the peasant's wife, the peasant's daughters, the peasant's mother, and the peasant's mother-in-law. So things are somewhat different. In addition to the goodies afore-mentioned, there is a considerable trade in ribbons, whistles, preserved gingerbread, milch-goats, religious artifacts in gold, in pure gold, and in real gold; as well as a brisk traffic in herbs, some for love potions, some for laxatives.

Up to the herbalist's stall falters an aged *bobba-bobba* in sixteen petticoats and twenty-seven shawls, all rusty black.

The Herbalist: What way may I serve the High-born Lady?

The *Bobba-bobba*: (Groans, putting both withered fists in the small of her back.) Something for the lower intestine?

The Herbalist: I have just the thing.

After that, up comes the *bobba-bobba*'s great-granddaughter.

The Herbalist: What way may I serve the High-born and Beautiful Lady? Parlé-voo Italino, Maddom?

The Girl: (Blushing) (In a whisper.) Something for the lower intestine?

The Herbalist: I have just the thing for you.

And then, by and by, up comes the girl's father.

Peasant: Say, ain't you new here? What become of Old Yockum, used to keep this pitch, hanh? (Hawks a phlegm and spits.)

The Herbalist: Yockum was gored by a boar in Hyperborea.

The Peasant: May the Resurrected Jesus Christ and All the Saints have mercy on his soul, goring was too good for him, the son of a bitch. Got something for the lower intestine?

Ah, the pawky peasantry of Poposhki-Georgiou!

Meanwhile, and just to show that the Machine—symbolized by (a) the narrow-gage railroad from (and, for that matter, to) the District Capital, (b) the one-boiler engine in the local mill, which grinds grits and goat-fodder, and (c)—but there is no (c)—Just to show that here the Machine has not destroyed the Spirit of the Countryside, traditional music is being supplied by an old man on a one-drone bagpipe, a crippled boy who clashes cymbals which are not mates, and a drunken fat woman with a tambourine. The peasants show their keen appreciation for this old tradition by dancing traditional jigs, breaking wind what time the music pauses, and, when the crippled boy holds out his hand, giving him their bad coins or else spitting in his dirty paw.

And whenever this last piece of prime wit is performed, oh see the peasants—that is, see the other peasants—clutch at their embroidered vests with both hands, wet their knee-breeches, fall into spasms, and roll into dung heaps.

Also Traditional, although missing from the local scene for many years: a mountebank in a cherry-colored coat, blue trousers which fasten under his shoes, and an enormous and ancient grey top-hat—The old folks, when they catch sight of him, poke each other and say, "Ahaha, a Russian Jester! Now we'll hear something good!" and they quicken their pace and crowd up close—the mountebank juggles three pomegranates, which he subsequently auctions off, keeps up a prolonged patter, full of coarse jokes . . . . somehow the fruit turns into bundles of booklets, almanacs, which he procedes to hawk for a few *groushek* each. . . . "All the Days of

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the Saints, in Gothic, Glagolitic, and Latin, with the right Signs of the Moon and the time to plant turnips, plus many excerpts from the Sacred Psalms,"—and here he says something, with a pious look and a learned air, something which the peasants assume to be Old Sclavonic, or High Church Gothic; next he summons up a small boy and pulls a pigeon's egg out of his ear; anon there are suddenly two balls which he juggles, anon suddenly there is only one.

The "Russian Jester": Funny, I had two when I started. (Slaps at himself).

And the peasants clutch their embroidered vests and—

Afterwards, the mountebank, off in a corner by himself, the unsold almanacs in his huge hat, a red kerchief spread out in his lap, is counting his pile of coppers. Most of the crowd is watching an unscheduled bit of entertainment, to wit a dog fight. This is at least as much fun as anything else, and has the added advantage that no one will try to take up a collection afterward.

"Greetings, purest one," someone says to the juggler. The juggler looks up slowly, one hand upon the coppers, says not a word.

The newcomer is a yellow-faced man, a man with a hairless face, deeply grooved; he wears the costume of a *tchilditz*, an itinerate sow-spayer. "Greetings, purest one," he repeats.

The mountebank smiles the faintest of smiles. "Say," he says, "you look a sight purer than I am."

The *tchilditz* nods. "I am a white dove," he says. "received the removal of freshly cares when I was a boy. Wasn't any law against it, then. —But you, no, you are a purest one. You know the Old Tongue. I heard you say it, back then, when you's talking about their false Psalms, yes I did. Didn't I." The two give swift glances around, their hands meet, are covered by the red kerchief. Does the kerchief move in the wind? Do their fingers move beneath the kerchief?—fingers touching fingers in some ritual play? It is all over in a moment.

"There are more of us around now than there used to be, aren't there?" the "Russian Jester" says.

The white dove nods head, strokes his long chin. "Yes, more. More. Not many. Never many. Nowhere many. Not since olden times. But all this is going to change. Soon. Changes be starting. You know?"

The jester shrugs, waggles his hands, cups an ear. "I hear. I just . . . *hear*. But I don't really *know*."

The *tchilditz* (his name, he says, is Jaaneck) comes closer and brings his mouth close to the mountebank's ear. Then he seems to think better of it. "Look here, what I be going to show you . . . *thee* . . . So look here. Look down here. Look—" And with his long stave he begins to draw something. Something like a map. "—and I'll see thee, then, tonight," he concludes. And starts away.

"Come brother, only two groushek, only two for this here almanac," the mountebank calls after him, holding one up, as if still trying to make a sale. There are faint smiles on both faces.

IT IS A FEATURE of the Triune Monarchy that indeed, it is of its essence, his Most Serene and Apostolic Majesty, Ignats Louis, is simultaneously King of Pannonia, Emperor of Scythia, and Basha of Transbalkania. However. As Engelbert Eszterhazy himself so often said, "Things are not simple." Nor are they. Transbalkania is itself a *Confoedorats*, consisting in

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Vlox-Minore, Vlox-Majore, Popushki, and Hyperborea. H.M.S.A.M. Ignats Louis, as every school-child knows, is thus High Duke of the Two Vlox, Prince of Popushki, and Grand Hetman of Hyperborea: *Pop. (1901) 132, 756. Principal exports: Sheepskins, boars'-bristles, dried artichokes, eisenglass, and musk. Capital: Apollograd (formerly Apolloöpolis).*

Apollograd is thus the smallest National Capital of the Triune Monarchy. Dr. Einhardt, the statistician, has calculated, in one of his rare droll moments, that it takes anything new an average of 17.5 years to move the 700-odd miles between Bella, the Imperial Capital, and Apollograd. ("That is," he adds, with the familiar twinkle in his kindly, myopic eyes, "when it moves at all!") Even now, one may see a group of boar-herds crossing themselves in awe at sight of "the samovar on wheels," as they call the Apollograd steam-tram; as it happens, the last steam-tram in Bella was discontinued over seventeen years ago. Provincial nobility still find it necessary to warn their servants on no account to blow out the gas-lights in the Grand Hotel Apollo and Ignats Louis. Even in the Saxon and the Armenian Quarters the majority of homes are illuminated by kerosene lamps, while most of the Tartars use rush-lights. The rubble-strewn streets of this last sector, formerly a by-word, are now, under the benevolently stern and progressive administration of the Governor of the City, Count Blopz, entirely a thing of the past.

The gas-mains have as yet to reach most of the streets in the older parts of town. Street lamps burning colza oil were tried by Count Blopz, on an experimental basis, early in his term of office; but it was found that the Tartars used to drain the oil and use it for cooking purposes. Visitors may, on payment of a small fee, obtain the service of a municipally-licensed porter with a lamp.

"I ain't seen *you* here before Brother," the porter Karposh commented one night, in the dipping and bobbing lamplight.

"Things in the bristle business are not what they were," his hire said, gloomily. "One must get closer to sources of supply." He might have been considered tall, had he not stooped so much. Perhaps conditions in the bristle business were weighing him down.

"That's what they tell me, Brother. Say, Brother, how about a drop of brandy before we get deep into Tartar Town?—No brandy *there*, you know, being all Musselmens," and he spat, *pro forma*, in the rutted, pitted road.

The traveller muttered something about the brandy not evaporating before they got back; and with this hint of future kindness Karposh had to pretend contentment. The houses huddled far back from the way, thatched-roofed and low-set. Now and again a dog, chained by a melon-patch, lifted its snouzle and bayed at the lemon-rind moon. And at length they came to their destination.

"See this here warehouse, Brother?" the guide asked, lifting the lamp as though to show to better advantage the peeling plaster and the rubble-and-stone walls beneath. "Used to be a what they call a caravanserai in the old days of the Turks. Camels they had here in them days. Fact! My old grand-dad he told—"

But perhaps what was told by Karposh *grandpère* may never be known to any other living soul, for at that moment the small door set into the big door opened, the traveller spoke a few words into the opening, the door

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opened a bit more, the traveller entered, the door creaked shut. Karposh grunted, set the lamp into a niche, lowered the wick, lowered himself to the turf, and, thinking of brandy, prepared to wait.

MANY, MANY CAMELS indeed could have been accomodated during the great days of the caravanserai; one thinks of them, Bactrians for the most part, wool peeling off in great patches, necklaces of big blue beads round their thick, crook necks, padding and bobbing and pressing on, league after hundred league, all the way from the Court of the Great Khan at Karakorum—perhaps—and even, perhaps, further. There were courtyards within courtyards, and warehouses which might have lodged the bristles of all the boars of Hyperborea: and bales more precious than that such, by far: galingale and benjoin, reels of silk, Indoo veilery thin as mist: but now nought but a few bare halls containing hair from the stinking swine of the Hyperborean ranges, destined to make paintbrushes for to whitewash the walls of Christendom.

The doorkeeper had a torch.

At each corner of each rectangle within the great serai, another with a torch.

Within a chamber that large its hither parts were only a lostness of shadows, two lines of men standing an arm's span apart, and each of them with a torch.

A Voice: This will be the last. None more may enter now.

The last passed down between the rows of torch-bearers and the torch-bearers fell into step behind him.

THE GATHERING was not very large, and neither was the inner room. At one end was a table with the embroidered table-cloth one saw on high occasions in the kitchens of prosperous farmhouses, and a modern oil-lamp sat on it, frosted chimney semi-covered with a bright pink globe. Three respectable men with side-whiskers sat at the table, and one was rendered twice-respectable by reason of his wearing eye-glasses with rather small, oval lenses. A stout woman all in black sat at a small harmonium; if she herself was not the widow of a prosperous butcher, surely she had a sister who was. Esterhazy sat as near the back of the fairly small congregation as was possible for him to do, the diaconal-looking man in spectacles nodded to the woman, she threw back her ample shoulders and began to play, with fairly few false notes, what one would automatically assume to be a hymn: but which Eszterhazy after a moment recognized as the Grand March from *Aïda*.

She did not play much of it.

The harmonium subsided on a sort of sigh, the deacon arose, took a handkerchief from his sleeve, and, in a voice heavy with emotion said, "Beloved brethren, dear saints who have kept The Faith, I have come to deliver unto you the joyful and so-long-awaited tidings: Saint Satan has at last been released from Hell, and, with all his Holy Demons, even now begins to prepare for his rule over all the Heavens and over all the earth. . . ."

The congregation burst into sobs, shouts, cries of ecstasy, throwing out their arms, clasping their hands, beating their bosoms, doubling forward in their seats, and, in a moment, first one by one, then by twos, then three and four at a time, leaping to their feet. A white-haired man in worn broadcloth, with the look and smell of a backwoods apothecary, turned to

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Eszterhazy and, with tears running down his furrowed face, embraced him and cried out, "*Satan is risen! Satan is risen!*"

And Eszterhazy, somewhat returning the embrace, said in the tones nearest to enthusiasm which at the moment he felt capable of, "Has he risen indeed?"

NOT THE LEAST of the interesting features of the Pannonian Presbyterian Church is that it sustains seventeen bishops, of whom fifteen are in Pannonia proper, and two—*in partibus infidelibus*, as it were—preside over the Synods of Scythia and Transbalkania. Sceptical Calvinists have been known to come all the way from Scotland (*especially* from Scotland) to check upon this; and to them the learned divines of the Reformed Faith explain that, Firstly, the institution was in a sense forced upon them by the Capitulations of 1593, that, Secondly, the bishops are chosen by lot and after fasting, meditation, and prayer, and without any hint of an Apostolic Succession, the bishop being in his synod merely First Among Equals among the other Calvinist clergy, and that, Thirdly—

But these visitors rarely desire to hear of Thirdly. They say, "Hoot!" and, "Wheesht!" they exclaim. And, "*Bee*shops, did ye say!" they murmur, casting up their eyes and hands.

Bishop Andreas Hugyvod walked up and down in his garden in the precincts of the Great Old Reformed Church in Apollograd. He was a man of enormous girth and staure, in a Geneva gown, a huge starched ruff, and a tricorn hat; and gave the impression of being a sort of catafalque stood on one end and moving under its own locomotion. In one hand he held, almost, indeed, engulfing, volume xxii of the octavo edition of Calvin's *Institutes*; with a tiny agate snuffbox pressed against the morocco binding; the other hand, or, at any rate, two fingers of it, were pressed to his nose. There was, let us say, a certain nobility to the bishop's nose. A certain grandness, an amplitude of architecture, rococco . . . or, perhaps, baroque. A painter, engaged by a committee of the Presbytery to fix the bishop's likeness in oils, had once, and only once, and most unwisely, declared the nose to be "Roman." So unchristian an emotion as wrath would certainly not have disfigured the episcopal countenance; however, he let it be known that he did not agree. And let us, therefore, leave it so. The nose of the Calvinist Bishop of Apollograd and all Transbalkania was not Roman. And, certainly, it was not Roman Catholic.

Walking to and from in his garden, meditating doubtless, upon the doctrines of Election, Predestination, and Total Depravity, he gazed with an unwinking solemnity at the approaching visitor. The vistor was tall, and walked in a somewhat stately manner, one hand clasped behind him in the small of his back. His frock coat was spotless, in itself somewhat unusual in Apollograd, which the bishop himself had more than once humorously referred to as "Apollograd the Dusty." And, when he removed his equally spotless silk hat and bowed, he revealed an imposing head, whose silvery hair had receded just sufficiently to remind one of Gogol's comment, in another context, "Forasmuch as he is wise, God hath added unto his brow." The visitor's head bulged appreciably on both sides, indicating that his hatter, at least, must certainly and most certainly have been aware of the ususual quality and quantity of brain

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matter beneath and behind the frontal and occipital bones.

The bishop, experienced in judging physiognomy and other matters indicative of profession, allowed the hand at his nose to fall away, and the snuff to dissipate in the wind (and, if not, to be joined to other dust motes of the National Capital, where, as has been hinted, they would scarcely be noticed), transferred book and box to that hand, and held the newly-unencumbered one out to the visitor, remarking as he did so, " Sir Advocate."

"Engelbert Eszterhazy, of the Faculty of Law, and for to serve Your Reverence. —But how—how did Your Reverence *know*?"

His Reverence waved the matter aside. "One knows," he rumbled. "One knows." He gave the visitor's hand another squeeze. "Well. Doctor Eszterhazy. So. Well. From Bella? Of course. From Bella. You see. One *knows*." He gave a slight shrug.

Merely a provincial bishop he might be, the shrug said, but he was well aware of a thing or two, videlicet that, firstly, the visitor was an Advocate at Law, Secondly, that as such he bore the title of Dr. Juris., and that, Thirdly, such a smart get-up was just the sort of smart get-ups worn by and worn only by members of the Society of Advocates in the Imperial Capital, but that, and after all, Fourthly, it was thus no use trying to humbug the bishop and maybe try to cozen him out of any of his First Fruits, Tithes, Annates, and/or other presbytiral perquisites: no use to try.

"Well, well, Your Reverence is of course quite correct. I have *not* come here to buy bristles!"

"Ho ho!" the bishop rumbled. "Ahahah. Bristles! Ha! That's good. That's a rich one. Bristles, no. But as for, ah, hum, *musk*?" He raised his eyebrows, twisted his mouth. "Concerning this the humble shepherd had better not ask; therefor he won't. *Ho!*"

Eszterhazy's manner, as he gave his head a slight shake, indicated that he was all too well aware of the reputation, in matters of amour, of the Faculty of Law. He said nothing of the fact that it had been decades since musk had been regarded as a proper gift by the higher-priced courtesans of the Imperial Capital.

"What shall I say to my excellent and reverend aqaintance, Pastor Eckelhofft, on your behalf, Bishop, when I return?"

"Eckelhofft, ah, Eckelhofft!" The bishop had deftly hiked up his gown and stuck the snuffbox in one pocket and the little book in another. He now raised both hands, palms out, and his eyes as well. "There is a soul for you! There is a mind! *Smart?* Smarter than six Jesuits! Christian souls in doubt and danger," he apostrophized them from his garden, with the rose-bushes and the linden trees as witnesses, "such as are subject to hazards innumerable, temptations and licentious doctrines being ever found in the great cities above all places under the sun: have no fear! Sebastian Eckelhofft stands like a beacon-light! Hearken unto *him*, dwellers in the great imperial high-city! Sit at *his* feet on the Lord's day! Eschew Lutheranism in all its forms, not to speak of even worse errors—"

The jurisconsult rubbed his long nose as though appreciative of these admonitions. "Quite a scholar, Pastor Eckelhofft," he said.

"None better. Cicero at his fingertips, Erasmus in the hollow of his hand. —I was once a bit of a scholar myself," the bishop said, a touch wist-

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fully. "Though little enough one finds for learning here, amidst the heathen hordes of Hyperborea."

" 'Heathen' ah yes. Your Reverence refers to the Tartars?"

His Reverence was not so sure. Tartars, he said, Tartars were but simple souls, honest and hard-working, deceived by a false and so-called prophet, true. But there was worse than Tartarism by far to be found in Hyperborea. A Tartar after all was a mere shadow of a Turk, and the Turks, bestial devotees of Lust in all its forms, still, even the Turks had recognized in the Reformed Faith a Faith free from idolotry in all its forms . . .

"There are those here worse than Tartars by far," he repeated darkly.

The visitor seemed both troubled and fascinated. "I would not dream of contradicting the immense wealth of knowledge and experience," he said, "on which Your Reverence must base his statements. No doubt it was to these historical events which Pastor Ecklehofft referred once or twice when we were discussing—he and I—the surprising hold which the Manichean heresies used to hold, so long ago, upon so many of the inhabitants of this once-flourishing (I refer to pre-Turkish times) district . . . eh?"

But the Bishop of Apollograd did not seem inclined to assent to the *eh?* "Historical events? Long ago? Used to hold? *Used* to hold? Pre-Turkish times? Ha *Ha!*"

Why—surely Bishop Hogyvod did not mean to imply that—?

Bishop Hogyvod *did* mean to imply. That.

Had Doctor Eszterhazy ever been in Poposhki-Georgiou.

Doctor Eszterhazy touched his own long nose thoughtfully. Yes, he had.

Did Dr. Esterhazy know the famous cheeses of Poposki-Georgiou? Doctor Eszterhazy did; so. And then he must know the method in which those cheeses were ripened. By being carefully wrapped in a clean pig's-bladder, and then wrapped inside of seven sacks, and then buried beneath a dung-heap for two months. "Is it two months?" he pondred. "Well, no matter, two months or—or whatever. The dung-heap, foul though it is, produces an even and continuous heat; a fact pointed out and utilized by the old alchemists. Though maybe not to make cheese. Nevermind. Nevertheless. You put the green cheese under the dung-heap, and, if you wait long enough, what do you get? Ripe cheese. Over-ripe, to my own way of thinking; blood of a she-wolf, how they stink! So now you understand." He gave his head a portentous nod, and stamped one of his huge feet on the herb-bordered flagstones of the garden path.

Evidently it took a moment for the visitor to clear his throat and pluck up courage to admit that he did *not*—

"What! Not understand? What, *not*" The back door of the Bishop's Seat opened and an elderly but spry woman came out, smoothing her apron. "What is there not to understand? You take the green cheese, that is to say, the Manichean or Dualist heresy, the damnable doctrine of the so-called Cathari, or Pure ones, the abominable teachings and practices of the Bulgarian Daemonoloters—you take this and you bury it beneath the dung-heap: that is, obviously, the long, long rule of the Orthodox, the Romanist Catholic, and the Turk: centuries of hiding beneath the surface of the world, like the worms they are, like the serpents which they be. And what

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do you get? Why what *would* you get, man? You would get stinking cheese, wouldn't you —Or, in other words, Christian Diabolism. What else?"

The old woman came up and courtsied in the high, antique style. "Good early evening, Sir Bishop, Cook says dinner is ready, and will the gentleman be staying—?"

The bishop's scowl, at the mention of the word *Dinner*, vanished like ice in a hot samovar. "Of course the gentleman will be staying, Mrs. Umlaut, do you take him for a fool, why should he eat those greasy kickshaws at the Grand Hotel when he can eat here?"

The gentleman murmured something about Regretting, and indeed tugged at a watch; but the bishop waved the watch back into its pocket. "What? *Not* eat here? *Not* have dinner at Apollograd Bishop's Seat? *Not* have. . . . . not have . . . ." Here his erudite nose went up a few inches, the nostrils dilated and gave an educated snif . . or two . . . "*Not* have cock-and-pullet soup with sour cream fresh dill Bosnian prunes? Not have grilled squabs farced with pounded chicken livers and shallots? Not have sweet and sour red cabbage and caraway seeds? Roast breast of heifer with crisp cracklings potato dumplings and sour krout fresh home-made noodles and pot cheese plum brandy fresh-roasted coffee with fresh-ground cinnamon apple-strudel-walnuts-rasins? *What?*"

Doctor Eszterhazy sighed. "Ah, Your Reverence has a certain way of putting things."

His Reverence said, "Ho *Ho!*" and, putting his hand between his guest's shoulder-blades, gave him a a friendly shove which might have staggered someone less sure on his feet. "Yes," said the bishop, "Christ-ian Diab-o-lism. . . . And would you believe, no: the flesh-pots of Egypt (that is to say: Bella) you know, but of this particular canker-sore you know nothing and would not believe. But *we* know and *we* believe! Yes! These scoundrels are stirring after their insufficiently-long slumber and sleep. Yes, these rogues are actually whispering about coming out into the open! Well, let them try! Tolerant we may be, but even Tolerance has its limits, and, after all, we are not the descendants of mice or of sheep, let me tell you a tale or two of that godly man, Duke Vladimir the Impaler, *rrrrrrr!*"

But by this time they had washed their hands and it was time for the bishop to say grace.

THE BUREAU of the Royal and Imperial Posts and Mails (Division of Semaphores and Telegraphs) had closed for the night; but opened as a courtesy to the Faculties of Law, Letters, and Medicine; plus a small gratuity.

"You have no objection to the use of American standard commercial code?" asked Eszterhazy.

"Doctor," the Royal and Imperial Telegrapher said, as he sat down at the instrument, "for another such amount, you may, if you please, send the entire corpus of the *Legends of The Saints*—in Glagolitic."

But Eszterhazy said he thought that the rather briefer message which he had prepared would do. At that moment the incoming set burst into a clatter.

" '*Most Important,*' " the clerk translated, and, brightening, suggested that it was the results of the football tournament holden that afternoon in Bella: but no.

" '*Bulgaria has invaded Turkey,*' " Esterhazy interpreted.

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" 'Most important'!" the telegrapher shrugged sarcastically, and, clearing his throat, began to tap the outgoing message.

THAT NIGHT the congregation of the illicit conventicle in Tartar Town was larger by several dozen. "Beloved brethren," the deacon began, "the glad tidings have begun to spread. It is our duty to help spread them, indeed. It is also, as always, our duty to accept martyrdom, and I am sure that oppression is as inevitable as—this time—it is bound to be transitory. For is not our local saying true, that 'We are in debt to the landlords' handerchiefs for the very sweat of our brows' as true as ever? Which of us indeed owns the fields he tills, the shops wherein he toils? Scarcely a one. If the monks, bishops, and archimandrites do not own the fabric of our livelihood, then some nobleman does. It is in their evil interests to defy Holy Saint Satan and to wage war upon his saints, but"

His voice stopped upon the interval for breath and in the shaveling of a second his voice, like that of everyone present, rose and fell upon a deep sound of *Ô*, which prolonged itself.

To his left, and in what had been until that second the darkness and dimness of the corner of the room-top, there appeared a head and face. In appearance it reminded one of the portrait in the Royal Imperial Art Museum in Bella, entitled *The Boyar Bogdanovich, After A Long Resistance to the Vlox, Being Led Away to Impalement On His Castle Walls*—the same air of ruined grandeur and defiant nobility—but it was more than twice the size of any merely human head or face; and tears of blood coursed from the glowing yellow eyes and fell silently into the darkness. The congregation fell with one accord upon their knees; and the lips opened and began to speak.

"Children of Light, falsely called 'of Darkness,'" the head spoke, in tones sonorous and echoing, *"the way which you intend is not the way. not . . . . not . . . . the . . . . the . . . . way . . . . way . . . ."*

The deacon broke the numinous silence. "O Blessed Saint Satan," he asked, imploringly, "what *is* the way?"

The lips writhed as though in anguish, the golden and glowing eyes rolled; at length the voice said, *"I shall send you a messenger and the token shall be the verse of the former scriptures about the land spread forth as though on wings. . . . ."*

And as the last words still throbbed in the ears, the vision and the visage began to fade, and again the congregational voice rose and fell and prolonged itself upon a deep sound of *Ô*.

THE GREAT Central Platform of the railroad terminal in Avar-Ister, capital of Pannonia, is seldom uncrowded. Here arrive and here depart the great expresses to and from Bella, almost their last stop this side of Constantinople, many of the fashionable travellers getting down to stretch their legs during the half-hour pause, to walk up and down, and buy the famous roses and the famous sweetmeats of the Co-Capital (as it is called, often, in Avar-Ister, and, seldom, in Bella). Here one changes for all the branch-lines which connect the second city of the Triune Monarchy with all places east and south (including Apollograd). Here one sees Yanosh, the once famous Gypsy dancer—that is, still famous, but no longer a dancer; not since losing two of his toes as the result of a bite inflicted during a lovers' quarrel by a jealous mistress—and his by now almost

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equally-famous dancing she-bear, Yanoshka. There is a saying to the effect that "Whoever sits upon the middle bench of the great Central Platform of the railroad terminal in Avar-Ister, if he sits long enough, will see pass in front of him everyone whom he knows;" at least, there is a saying to that effect in Avar-Ister . . . sometimes called "the Paris of the Balkans."

Sometimes.

At the moment (the moment being midnight) it was difficult to see just who *was* sitting on the middle bench, for a crowd of travellers was milling around watching Yanosh beat his Gypsy tambourine, shouting hoarsely, as Yanoshka, head up, shuffled up and down upon the soles of her huge feet. A thin gentleman in a high, starched collar with rounded ends looked around uncertainly. At that moment someone rose from the middle bench and approached him.

"Mr. Abernathy?"

The thin gentleman removed a finger from its place between his collar and his neck, adjusted his eyeglasses, and said, "Sir, I *am* Silas Abernathy, sole Representative in Scythia-Pannonia-Transblakania of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Southwestern Nebraska Railroad; might you be Doctor Eszterhazy? You *are!* Well, say, I want to thank you for your wire, and —say, are you a doctor of medicine, a doctor of philosophy, or a doctor of jurisprudence?"

"Yes," said Eszterhazy.

Mr. Abernathy blinked, gave an uncertain chuckle, then plunged ahead. "Say, I don't know how you learned that those ten townships alongside our right-of-way have finally come out of litigation, but you are one hundred percent right that the A,P, and SN line desires to settle them with You-roe-pene settlers of an industrious nature. The soil is deep, sir, the soil is fer-tyle, it can grow corn (maize, as you call it), it can grow pertaters, it can grow winter wheat, and the A,P, and SN line is not only willing to sell it to the right parties for nothing down and three dollars a acre over twenty-five years, but we are also willing and eager to pay all of their moving and travelling expenses for their persons and baggage. Say, they can be their own landlords in no time flat, with a good crop er two, and they can also enjoy freedom of the press if they are of a literary pursuit in their spar time, as well as freedom of speech, needless to add mention of freedom of rulligion—"

"Needless," said Eszterhazy. "And, pray, do not forget to mention, when you speak to their leader, Deacon Philostr Grotz, that according to may exegetes and scholars, North and South America, in the singular shape of the conjoined continents, may have been mentioned in the Old Testament as 'the land spread forth as though on wings'—"

"Say" said Mr. Abernathy, "that's *right*. No, I sure *won't* forget. They'll be good customers for our line, Doctor, we prefer above all other types of settlers your You-roe-pene settler of a deeply rulligious nature. Say, we certainly must have you over for Sunday morning breakfast sometime in Bella, Mr. Abernathy, she makes *waffles*, sir, she makes *pan*cakes—"

Eszterhazy with a look of apology having received consent, raised his right index finger and touched a part of Abernathy's skull. "You are of a greatly philoprogentitive nature, I see."

"Well sir (say, it is almost time for my train) well sir, the Mrs and I are both children of the great and fer-tyle prairies (the steppies, as you call um), and I don't hesitate to say that we

(cont. on page 47)

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In his "Black Hawk of Valkarth" (September, 1974) Lin Carter told how young Thongor's northland clan was destroyed in war, leaving the youth orphaned and alone among the living. Now the story continues, as Thongor discovers—

THE CITY IN THE JEWEL

LIN CARTER

Illustrated by STEPHEN E. FABIAN

1. As The Sun Died

THE FIERCE TROPIC SUN of old Lemuria had long-since passed the zenith of day.

Now it descended the dome of heaven to perish in a pyre of crimson vapors that lit the dim west with flame.

In all this desolate land of jagged, jumbled rock, nothing lived, nothing moved, but—shadows!

The level shafts of flaming light struck across the vast tableland of the plateau and drew long ink-black shadows from the circle of standing stones amidst the waste.

Seven they were, and twice taller than a man: tapering columns of dark volcanic stone, rough-hewn, coarsely porous. They stood in a circle on the plain of broken rock, and the red rays of the sinking sun drew long tapering shadows from them. Seven long black narrow shadows . . . like the fingers of a monstrous, groping hand.

Glyphs were deep-cut in the ringed monoliths. Ages of time had slowly all-but worn them smooth. Yet still were they faintly legible, were there any eye to read them in this shadowy land of stone and silence.

That which stood amidst the circle of standing stones caught the red rays of sunset and flashed with gem-like brilliance.

It was a vast rugged mass of crystal, cloudy, misted: a huge gem of green and sparkling silver, so large that the arms of a full-grown man could scarce encompass it.

Into nine hundred uneven geometric facets was the glimmering crystal cut. Each facet was engraven with a curious sigil; each sigil was subtly alike the others, yet no two were precisely the same.

As the sun died in thunderous glory on the western horizon, the faceted stone caught the last beams and burst ablaze with sparkling splendor.

Amidst the shimmering radiance, the strange sigils glowed weirdly, as if sentient. Like watchful eyes, cold, alert, intent, they peered through the purpling shadows.

No man alive on earth in all that distant age could read those carven signs on the monstrous jewel, nor spell the sense of those deep-carved and age-worn glyphs upon the seven monoliths.

But something pulsed amidst the blazing radiance of the stone and as it lay bathed fully in the sunset flames.

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Power!
Vast, awesome magical.
And . . . *deadly.*

2. When Dragons Hunt

FOR FIVE HOURS now the boy had fled for his life, and now he had reached the very end of his strength.

His numb legs would move no further and he fell, gasping for breath, in the coarse rubble that bestrew the plateau.

His lungs were afire and his throat ached rawly and thirst was like a raging torment within him. But he could flee no more.

Against the blaze of sunset, the dragons circled. Black horrid shapes with snaky necks and ragged, bat-like wings. They had caught the hot scent of manflesh shortly past mid-day and they had hunted him lazily down the high mountain pass that cleft all this mighty range, the Mountains of Mommur, and across this bleak and desolate tableland, until they had worn him to the point of exhaustion.

Now they swung lazily, wings booming like sails on the quickening breeze, cold ferocity flaring in the mindless reptilian eyes that shone through the gathering dusk like yellow coals.

Sprawled panting amidst the broken stones the boy glared up at them, his strange gold eyes blazing lion-like through tangled black locks. He did not fear them and would fight them to the last with every drop of strength in his bronzed and brawny form. But he was doomed, and he knew it.

His savage people, a tribe of the cold north, had a saying. *When dragons hunt, the boldest warriors hide.*

He was young, perhaps seventeen or a trifle less, and nearly naked, his brown hide bare save for high-laced sandals and a rag of cloth twisted about his loins. His breast and strong arms, back, belly and shoulders were scored with old scars and white with road-dust, for he had come far—halfway across the world, it seemed, from that gore-drenched battlefield whereon all his people had died save he alone. Down from the wintry tundras of the frozen Northlands had he come, alone and on foot, battling savage beasts and even more savage men, and the scars of many battles marked him.

Strapped in a worn old scabbard across his broad young shoulders, a great Valkarthan broadsword lay. It was his only weapon: and it was useless against the winged death that hovered, lazily flapping, against the sky of darkening crimson. Had he but a bow he could perchance have struck down the flying horrors that had playfully, cat-like, lazily hunted him all afternoon down the bleak mountains to this desolate plateau.

Here, in a brief red scarlet flare of agony, he would die. And here his bare white bones would lie bleaching to powder under the Lemurian skies for ever.

But he knew no fear, this bronzed boy who lay helpless, panting, exhausted.

This boy—Thongor.

3. Where Horror Dares Not Pass

SUDDENLY a cold hand went gliding across his hot thigh. He jerked about, nape prickling with primal night-fears, one capable fist seizing the hilt of the two-handed broadsword. Then he relaxed, panting.

It was a cold black shadow had crept across his flesh, dark and stealthy. A long tapering shadow, like a pointing finger.

Curious, the boy raised himself on one arm and peered about to see the

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source of that shadow.

He threw his tangled black mane back from his face and stared with amazement.

Stared at the ring of dark columns that encircled a low cube of black stone like a rude altar. And stared at that which glittered and flashed thereupon.

He was staring directly into the sunset, but that roiling mass of crimson flame was less brilliant than the immense and sparkling jewel that stood amidst the monoliths.

Cold wind swept over him in a gush!

Foetid, hot breath blew stinkingly in his face. He flinched—ducked—as one of the scaly horrors of the upper sky swung low, snapping yellowed fangs at his flesh.

The dragons were bolder, now. Or, perhaps—hungrier.

He staggered to his feet, levering himself erect with one hand braced against a broken shoulder.

He would meet death face to face, standing on his two feet like a man, he thought grimly.

They swung about far above, the twin bat-winged horrors, circling for the kill.

He glared about for a place to stand, a tall stone to set his shoulders against, and suddenly he bethought him of that circle of smooth lava pillars. The monoliths were set close together: the bat-winged horrors would not be able to come at him from above or behind it if he set his shoulders against one of those pillars; they could only come at him from in front, and then they would face the glittering, razory scythe of that mighty broadsword wherewith he and his forefathers had fought against many a foe. Perhaps he had a chance after all.

Staggering a little, his aching legs still numb with bone-weary exhaustion, he headed for the ring of standing stones and the sparkling enigma they guarded and enclosed.

He drew the great sword. He set his back against the rough cold stone and took his stand. He threw back his head and hooted a challenge to the winged predators of the sky.

They swerved and came hurtling down at him, the flapping black shapes. He could see the flaring coals of their burning eyes and the immense grinning jaws lined with yellowed fangs, the long snaky necks stretched hungrily for him, clawed bird-feet spread to cling and rip—

Ignoring the ache of weariness in chest and arms and shoulders, the boy swung up the great sword as the flying dragons flashed for him—

—And swerved aside!

Puzzled, the boy's strange gold eyes narrowed thoughtfully. He watched through tousled black locks as the flying reptiles curved in their flight, veered away, and flapped off hesitantly, to rush down at him again.

Again they came swooping down.

And again they veered to one side at the last moment.

It was strange. It was more than strange, it was a little frightening. It was as if those horrid dragons of the sky—*feared* the circle of standing stones!

Propped against the rough pillar, leaning weary arms on the cross-hilt of the great sword, the boy, Thongor, watched as the sunset died to smouldering coals. The skies darkened as Night rose on black wings up over the edges of the earth to shroud the great continent in shadows.

The dragons hovered and circled, and, at length, flapped away and were lost in the gathering darkness.

Then the boy turned to explore this

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peculiar ring of monoliths . . . where even the fanged predators of the sky dared not come near. This circle of stones which mailed dragons of might dared not pass!

4. The City In The Jewel

THONGOR EXAMINED the seven stone pillars. They were of cold dead rock, dark, volcanic, rough and porous to the touch. With curious fingers the young Barbarian traced the strange hieroglyphs wherewith they were inscribed. He could make nothing of the curious symbols, but, then, as for that, he could neither read nor write. He had no way of guessing that those inscriptions were in a long-dead tongue whose last living speaker had perished from the earth untold aeons before . . .

He next approached the low altar.

It was a six-sided cube of black rock and it bore no carvings.

Atop it, the great gem flashed and twinkled.

Never had the boy seen a mass of crystal so immense. He bent over it curiously, and the cold shifting lights that moved within bathed his features in a restless glow.

It was a strong young face, square of jaw and broad of brow and cheekbone. Scowling black brows curved over lion-like eyes. Sun and wind had burnt it to the hue of old leather; there was strength in that face, and intelligence, and breeding. Though how a half-naked wild boy from the savage wildernesses of the wintry Northlands had come by that breeding, none could say.

He was curious about the carven sigils which adorned the glassy surface of each of the odd-angled facets, and he stretched out his hand to trace them—

And jerked back numb, tingling fingers with a little cry! A cold electric shock had stabbed at him as his outstretched fingers touched the slick glassy surface—a weird thrilling force.

Frowning, puzzled, he bent over the glittering, flashing gem and peered deep into it.

Deep and deep . . . through the angled mirrors of the facetting . . . down through twinkling mists of dim green and sparkling silver dust . . . to the strange pulsing core of the monstrous gem, where cold phosphorescent fires coiled and glared.

But something happened. The crystal—changed!

The mists thinned—faded—evaporated.

Had the touch of his fingers closed a contact between the boy and the forces that slumbered, locked deep within the mystery jewel?

Had his nearness triggered some dormant, age-old spell—some mystic sorcery whose secret was traced in the weird sigils wherewith the facets of the gem were hewn?

Sparkling mists coiled—cleared—whipped away!

Suddenly the clouded green crystal was clouded no more. Now it was clear and pellucid as glass . . . and the boy's eyes widened in amazement as he stared down upon that which was now clearly visible in the very core of the gigantic gem. He stared down upon . . .

A city! A city there in the heart of the jewel!

It was exquisite; elfin. Tiny delicate minarets and needle-pointing spires of dainty glistening ivory. Swelling bells of domes twinkling with goblin lights. Delicious little houses, peak-roofed and gabled, with stained-glass windows no bigger than his thumb-nail.

A faërie princedom in the frozen

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heart of a gem!

Breathless with awe and wonder, the savage boy stared down at little crooked streets cobbled as if with cowrie shells; at curved flights of alabaster stairs a finger-joint in width; at elfin gardens of miniature trees where tiny brooks meandered like shimmering strips of blue satin ribbon.

All of exquisite ivory it was, walls fretted like lace, thread-thin, lit with tiny silver lamps like acorn shells. He stared down at courts tiled with malachite; at walls of rosy coral, towers of glistening jade, slender arcades of delicate marble pilasters, beams of ebony, scrolled carvings over windows, balconies, balustrades—so tiny it hurt the eye to search their detailwork.

It was an elfin mirage—a goblin vision—a glimpse into a strange miniature world of marvel.

And gone in the flicker of a lash!

In a breath the city blurred—faded—and was gone. The huge gem clouded again with swirling mists of jade shot through with dazzling coils of silver sparkles. The boy frowned in bafflement and stepped away from the squat cube of black stone and the glittering globe of mystery it bore.

Had it been a dream—a vision—an enchantment?

Whatever it was, it was gone.

5. Dreams in Jade and Silver

THE BOY GROWLED a wordless oath and fingered a small idol of white stone that hung about his throat suspended on a leathern thong. His tribal fetish, a crude thing, like a bearded face crowned with a circle of stars.

His scalp prickled with superstitious awe. Wild young Barbarian that he was, a scorner of cities, a battler from birth, reared in a harsh land of ignorant savages where every phenomenon of nature is an inexplicable wonder, he instinctively hated and feared magic and dark wizardry.

And that weird gem, that glyph-inscribed circle of ominous dark stones—*stank* of wizardry!

He stood warily, like a young animal at bay, before the twinkling stone. Its inner fires were quiesent now, calm, dully glittering. And yet he feared it and the unknown forces that had fashioned it, and which perhaps lurked within it.

Should he quit this strange place that even the dragons feared? Should he dare the grim dangers of the night beyond, the prowling predators, great black shapes that crept through the broken waste of stone, hunting hot flesh?

Sunset had died to faintly glowing coals by now; the plateau was deep in darkness; the sky a mass of turgid vapors, hidding the few faint stars that had dared to emerge at the sun's death. To venture forth from this curiously protected place into the unknown dangers of the plateau might be foolhardy.

Soon the great golden moon of old Lemuria would rise over the edges of the world to flood all the land in light; then he could traverse the rocky tableland in relative safety. He would still be prey to all the roaming monsters of the dark, but at least he could see them and protect himself against their attack with the great sword that he still clasped in his hand.

Perhaps the wisest thing to do was to wait here behind this ring of standing stones which, for some reason, the beasts seemed to fear. Wait here for the moonrise, and then set forth

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upon his long journey to the Dakshina, to the lush and jungled Southlands, with their golden cities and mighty kings. There was his goal and his destiny.

He would wait for the moon.

But he was still bone-weary from being hunted down the mountain passes by the twin dragon-hawks. He would rest here, stretch out his aching limbs, ignore the thirst that raged within his throat like a flame, the hunger that growled in his empty belly. He lay down on the smooth rock, between the black cube of the altar and the soaring pylons.

And, of course, he slept . . .

Strange dreams filled his brain with curious visions.

It seemed that as he lay there in the darkness a cold radiance bloomed within the enormous mass of crystal; a weird luminance of mingled jade and silver that pulsed like a living heart—a heart of throbbing light!

Waves of green and silvery glare swept over his sleeping body, and from somewhere within the huge pulsing core of light that the magic gem had become a far, faint voice called to him in a language he did not understand.

But the message of those words he understood all too well.

The voice lured, sang, beckoned. It was sirenic; it called to him irresistibly. It sang of marvels and wonders, of impossible beautiful things, of unguessable mysteries . . . and he yearned to obey that mystic summons.

Like chiming silver bells the voice spun a net of magic about his sleeping mine . . . and drew him . . . drew him, on and on . . .

And in that strange, haunted dream it seemed to the boy that he opened his eyes and rose lithely to his feet, for all that he still slept. Step by step, entranced, wide-eyed, but still deep in slumber, he approached the great jewel.

It was ablaze now, a throbbing sphere of radiance. An aura of crackling power stood out around it like a huge glittering gateway—and through that gateway the tiny elfin city could be seen clearly now, yet it was somehow no longer small, but large . . . large enough for him to enter and to walk those crooked winding streets, to stroll those cool enchanted gardens, to quaff chilled sparkling wine in those ivory palaces . . .

Step by step he strode up to the burning gate—

—And came awake in a ringing silence!

6. Through the Crystal

SHOCK sluiced over him like a cold, unexpected shower. In his sleep he had, in truth, risen and approached the great gem and now he stood frozen, his extended hands only inches from the glistening crystal, which was, even as in his dream, ablaze with whirling lights and a beating aura of throbbing force.

Rage flamed in the heart of the boy savage. This vile witchery aroused his wrath. His scowling brows cortorted. His lips drew back in a challenging snarl, baring white wolflike teeth. A deep menacing growl rumbled in his deep chest.

"Gorm!"

Growling aloud the name of his primal god. the youth reached forward deliberately and seized ahold of the huge sparkling crystal, as if challenging it to work its secret wizardries!

An icy tingling ran through him as he touched the chill, slick crystal. An electric shock that numbed him as it

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flickered along his nerves. Waves of cold dazzle buffetted his mind, dulled his sight. He staggered on numb limbs—he fell—

Into the crystal!

It was as if in the instant he fell forward the hard sparkling surface melted into a glittering mist that swirled about him in icy coils but offered no resistance to his warm flesh. He fell forward and down and through the crystal . . . and hurtled into the dark throat of a spinning vortex of swirling jade and silver motes of light.

The odd thing about it all was that he felt neither surprise nor fear. It was like some weird occurrence within a dream—too fantastic and improbable to be real, and hence nothing for him to fear, since it could not really be happening.

He fell through the whirling vortex of moted light and now, it seemed, he fell slower and slower, as if the whirling vaporous diamond spangles of jade and silver radiance beat up and somehow sustained his weight.

In the next instant he struck a sloping surface with stunning force and went rolling down an incline.

Crisp, dew-wet, emerald grass slid across his limbs and he came to rest in a mass of drowsy flowers under an amber sky of dim, luminous vapors.

Dazed and uncomprehending, he stared about him wide-eyed at clumps of strange feathery trees that loomed up against the topaz twilight . . . trees without leaves, whose slick black boughs bore fantastic peacock-plumes of metallic green and gold and lapis.

Beyond them, weird, impossibly slender animals of snowy white grazed the dewy sward. Earth, he knew, had never bred those strange yet lovely creatures with their silken hide and long thick gold manes. If not earth, then—where was he?

Then a vagrant glitter caught his gaze and drew it beyond the feathery trees and the grazing unicorns . . . to the exquisite soaring minarets and swelling domes of a faërie city that lifted in the haze of distance.

The city in the jewel!

This was no dream, but strange reality.

As real as the fantastically-clothed, bird-headed warriors who stood ringed about him—dissolved from emptiness in a twinkling—as real as the spear-blades of cold blue steel leveled at his naked breast!

7. The Man With No Face

THEY TOOK from him the great broadsword and its scabbard and baldric, and they bound his wrists behind his back with tinkling brass chains, or chains of what looked like ruddy, glistening brass, and all the while he stared at them with wonder.

At first he thought they had in very truth the heads of birds; later he determined that they wore curious avian headdresses or helmets. They were very lifelike: plumed at the crest, with sleek gleaming feathers down over the face, glittering soulless eyes, and cruel hooked beaks.

Bird-like, too, the fantastic costumes they wore: robes and cloaks of woven plumage; hooded gauntlets affixed to their hands like the claws of winged predators. Even their tunics were woven of the soft breast-feathers of hawks.

The bird-warriors moved like automations, without a sound, stiffly. They spake utterly no word to him, not deigning to reply to his questions. Neither did they handle him with rough, uncaring manner . . . it was as if someone had commanded them to

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seize him, disarm him, and render him helpless, but taking all the while the greatest possible care to see that he was not harmed.

It was odd. It was very odd. Thongor filed it away for future thought: just another of many mysteries.

Then they led him through the glittering streets into the impossible city.

Dawn—pearly, nacreous, rosy-pale—lit the strange amber skies as he was led captive into the weirdly beautiful city. But like no dawn that ever Thongor had seen on earth, for there was no sun, no orb of fiery light, but merely a gradual brightening of the vaporous sky into sourceless dim radiance.

He had not yet in his young life ever seen a city of men, save for the crude villages of his native Northlands; but he somehow knew no terrene metropolis was like to this.

He became aware, just then, of yet another strangeness.

The air was cool and clear and scented faintly of blooming flowers. But the honey-hearted warmth of verdant summer lay beneath the dewy coolness of dawn. And that was—*madness*.

For when he had come pelting down the great Jomsgard Pass that cleft in twain the Mountains of Mommur, it had been Phuol, the third month of winter. Yet no snow locked this land in its icy grip, and from the scented air and dewy lawns and flowering trees he had already seen, it seemed more like late spring—the month of Garang, say—or the month of Thyron in early summer.

Which reminded him of another unanswerable mystery.

For it had been in the very hour of sunset he had lain down beside the weird jewel. But here it was—*dawn!*

Thongor shook his head with an angry growl, as if to clear his mind of these mysteries. But already he suspected the truth: he was no longer in the world he knew, the world wherein he had been born, but in—another. Or mayhap within the magic jewel the sequence of day and night were curiously reversed, and the seasons of the year as well.. Mystery upon mystery!—but their answers were of no importance. Whether or not he had been reduced in stature by some weird enchantment and now dwelt within the jewel, or whether the jewel was itself but the magical gateway which led to this strange new world, these did not matter.

What mattered was that, wherever he was, he was prisoner of those that ruled this ensorcelled world of timeless summer.

As he went on between his bird-masked captors, he stared about him with dawning wonder, forgetting his superstitious fears and the grim fact of his captivity. Everywhere he looked, vistas of radiant and enchanting loveliness opened before him: dim arcades of slender, twisting columns wherein small shops offered trays of fabulous gems, gorgeous broideries, flagons of precious vintages.

Beautiful beyond belief the city lay in the dim morning, and yet a shadow of unseen horror haunted it. For in the pale golden faces of the robed and bearded inhabitants he caught the look of—fear.

Fear, too, lurked in their low musical voices as they conversed, covertly eyeing the boy as his captors led him through the streets. Fear, and a glint of something else: perhaps—pity?

The boy stared about him, and he knew the city could not be real. Oh, it seemed solid enough, and doubtless was, but—unreal, for all its solidity.

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He was led past a bell-shaped dome that glittered and flashed in morning radiance. All of rock-crystal it was, and never yet has this earth produced a cliff of pure crystal so vast as that curving and unbroken dome.

And the tower, the white minaret, builded all of one shaft of solid ivory. The seas and forests of the earth gave birth to no lumbering behemoth so vast as the unthinkable beast whose *single horn* supplied the snowy ivory for that solid tower!

Into a great, turretted citadel of sparkling jade and marble the warriors led him, and thence to an immense domed hall where his shackles were affixed to a ring in the floor. Food in a shallow bowl of some dark crimson wood, and a crystal flagon of water, were set at his feet. Then the soldiers left him.

Being Thongor, the first thing he did was to eat and to drink as much as his belly could hold.

And, when at length his hunger and thirst were assuaged, he attempted to break either his shackles, his chains, or the ring in the floor.

Tough young thews swelled along his strong arms; bands of iron muscle writhed and stood out in sharp relief across his deep chest and broad shoulders; his scowling face blackened with effort; but the sparkling metal, which looked like brass, was of an unbreakable hardness.

So—being Thongor—he lay down, resigned his problems to the turn of future events—and slept.

A gentle hand on his shoulder brought him to full instant wakefulness like a startled jungle cat.

The man who bent over him was old and lean and robed in white silken stuff. The cowl or hood of his gown was drawn covering his features.

"Are you awake, boy? Do not fear me, I am a captive—a slave, like yourself," the aged one said in a quiet, cultured voice.

Thongor relaxed. "Why do you ask? Do I look asleep?" he growled curtly. The old man shrugged, seating himself tailor-fashion on the floor.

"Alas, I cannot tell. I have no eyes with which to see whether you sleep or wake," he said. Thongor bit his lip, angry at his own rudeness.

"Your forgiveness, grandfather," he grunted. "I did not know you were blind . . ."

"Not blind, my son—without eyes. There is, you will perceive, a difference."

Thongor shrugged. "I do not understand."

"I will show you, then, if you will promise not to be afraid of me. For, however dreadful my appearance, it is not of my doing, and I am no enemy of yours, however horrible to your sight my visage may be," the old man said.

And lifting one slender, wasted hand he drew aside his cowl and laid bare to the horrified gaze of the boy a sight of unthinkable terror. For he had no face, no face at all, merely a blank and featureless oval of pale unwrinkled skin: no eyes or nose or mouth, or, if mouth there was, a veil of tight skin was stretched over the opening.

"*Gorm* . . . "Thongor said hoarsely; if it was a curse, it was also half a prayer.

"Our Lord Zazamanc is sometimes . . . capricious," the old man said gently.

8. Ithomaar the Eternal

"HOW DID YOU come to be—like that?" Thongor asked in a low voice. The old man veiled his horrible,

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blank visage behind that merciful mask of white silk and began to speak in a low, quiet voice.

"Listen to me, my son, we have little time. I cannot answer your questions now, not all of them. In a very short while you will be taken from this place and brought before the Lord of this city, and it is my task to prepare you for that meeting. So do not interrupt, but let me speak swiftly of that which you must know in order to be spared such horror as I have endured.

"My name is Yllimdus, and I came to this place even as did you—through the crystal. My city is Kathool of the Purple Towers; in my youth I was a jewel-merchant, and oft led caravans into the Mountains of Mommur, seeking for gem fields. On one such expedition, I achieved a rocky plateau and discovered, amidst the level tableland, a circle of standing stones and within that circle a great gem: but I need not detail my discoveries and my experiences further, for you have known them, or you would not be here. Is it not so?"

"It is," said Thongor. Yllimdus nodded.

"Ages ago, when the world was young and the Seven Cities of the East flourished, there arose a powerful sorcerer, a strange man of deep wisdom and uncanny mastery of the occult sciences: Zazamanc the Veiled Enchanter.

"This strange being achieved heights of power unguessed at by mortal men; his lifespan he extended far beyond the endurance of human flesh; his searching gaze probed the hidden cranies of the moon, the surface of distant worlds, the dark gulf between the stars. Yet for all his learning and magistry, he was a thing of flesh and blood, and death comes to all that liveth, be it ne'er so wise. Zazamanc brooded long over his impending mortality, and at length perceived a method whereby he might cheat Death itself and outlive the aeons.

"With his magical arts he constructed a crystal of perdurable substance; within that crystal he built a private universe where Time could not come and Death was not nor could enter therein. A gorgeous city he constructed, raised by the hands of invisible and captive spirits, and therein a magic land was created, whereover Zazamanc shall rule forever, an undying king, immortal and omnipotent as a god.

"This city he named Ithomaar the Eternal, for that nothing within it can ever age or die. And the kingdom whereover Zazamanc rules is the dwellingplace of captive peoples such as you and I—unwary travelers, lured by the mystery of the crystal and its singing voice—who have entered into this magical land and cannot ever leave."

"These things are fantasies, grandfather!" Thongor growled.

"Alas, my son, they are utter truth," Yllimdus said gently. "Tell me: what year is it in the great world beyond, the world from which you came?"

"Why, let me see; it is winter in the six thousand nine hundred and ninety-ninth Year of the Kingdoms of Man," Thongor said. There ensued a silence of some duration. Then—

"So long . . . so very long," whispered the old man with no face. "Ah, lad, it was spring in the Year of Kingdoms of Man 4971 when I came hither on that venture . . . *for two thousand years have I dwelt here in this accursed paradise beyond the reach of Time!*"

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"Gods! Can this thing be true?" Thongor muttered.

Yllimdus sighed: "All too true, lad; here we can never die. O, I have prayed for death in my centuries . . . but we are beyond Death's hand, here, aye . . . and beyond the power of the Nineteen Gods themselves!"

"This sorcerer, this Zazamanc," the boy asked, "What will he do with—me?"

A dim echo of horror entered the gentle tones of the ancient man.

"He will . . . play . . ."

9. The Veiled Enchanter

IN THIS DIM WORLD where no sun shone to light the day nor moon to shed her pallid radiance by night, it was impossible to guess the passage of time. Thongor soon discovered this strange truth. Tall windows, narrowed, pointed, barred with thick grilles of that strange brass-like metal which Yllimdus had named *orichalc*, let in the dim opal light. Thongor thought to observe the movement of time by the shifting across the floor of the patch of strangely-colored radiance cast through that pointed narrow window . . . but it did not move; neither did it wane.

At some unguessable time later, the warriors came to take him before the Enchanter for . . . judgment?

Yllimdus had warned that to the proud, cold immortal who ruled this miniscule world, lesser men were slaves, toys, naught but cattle. Here in this world his art had made he was a very god, and could play with his human toys as he wished. Men could not die in this dim eternal world, but they could—suffer. So, as the whim struck him, Zazamanc the Veiled Enchanter transformed them—mutilated them into weirdly horrible monsters. Some were quaint, droll hybrids: men with the heads of insects, women with flower-petals instead of hair, dwarfed little beings, gaunt giants, men with neither arms nor legs who wriggled about like naked pallid fleshy serpents.

Yllimdus himself had been a courtier until his Lord wearied of his cautious advice and sage counsel. And thus, with a potent cantrip, the old man had been transformed into a faceless thing of horror. Thongor's eyes smouldered with rage and the nape-hair bristled on his neck like the hackles of some jungle beast. The wild boy was no stranger to cruelty. Nature herself is cruel, and men are her children and have inherited much of her ways. But the boy knew only the sudden, savage cruelty of swift death, or red roaring war, of man battling against man or against brute.

This sort of cruelty, casual, cold, cynical—this was new to him. And it chilled him with an unsettling mixture of horror and nausea and contempt. He wondered what sort of a man could so negligently and carelessly disfigure another man who had done him no greater ill than merely to bore him . . . if, indeed, Zazamanc was only a man.

For this was of the species of cruelty man usually suffers at the hands of playful and uncaring gods. Was, then, this Veiled Enchanter a god? True: he had created all of this miniature world within the jewel, and that was godlike.

And—a thrill of dread went through the boy at the thought—if he was a god, could gods be slain?

THE WARRIORS who escorted the savage boy through the magnificent palace of the Enchanter were curious beings themselves, and as he paced

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along in their midst, young Thongor stole many curious glances at them in a covert fashion.

They were not bird-warriors like those who had arrested him beyond the city.

These were cold-faced, pale, expressionless men. They were automation-like, even as had been the warriors in the fantastical avian costumes. But most of all they were like dead men somehow embued in some grisly and necromantic fashion with the uncanny semblance of life, but devoid of life's animation.

Old Yllimdus had spoken of these, back in the prison hall. He had used a curious word to describe them —*avathquar*—"living dead." An odd, uneasy, disturbing word. Thongor's hide crawled at the touch of them, cold and flaccid, like the puffly flesh of corpses.

Yllimdus, who had been imprisoned for some duration within the great hall, having incurred the dislike of his Lord, had warned him of these, and had said that not everyone came through the Jewel Amid The Seven Pillars—alive. Some were drawn through, and were dead when they materialized within the miniature world. Perchance it was these fresh cadavers, magically animated by some occult science, that became the *avathquar*. It was a peculiarly unsettling thought, and he eyed them with frank curiosity as they led him along.

They seemed completely drained and empty, and they had none of life's warmth and passion. He wondered if they truly lived, or if they were but automatons of dead flesh vitalized in some weird manner by the power of the Enchanter. They were splendid specimens of manhood, surely, tall and strongly built and handsome in a regular sort of way. But they strode along like puppets, looking neither to the right nor to the left, their pale stern faces hard and blank, their cold eyes empty of alertness.

Bemused by such thoughts as these, Thongor saw little of the superb corridors and halls and chambers through which they led him; ever after he retained but a blurred impression of blazing tapestries seething with color and motion, or glowing figurines and statuettes of unearthly grace and life-like detail, or of carven marble walls and fretted screens of ivory and soaring columns and arched and vaulted ceilings painted with weird and mythological frescoes.

At length they led him into a colossal hall floored with black marble like a gigantic mirror.

Far above, lost in dim shadows, an enormous dome reared atop thick columns of a sea-green stone unfamiliar to him. About the walls more of the zombi-like warriors stood, motionless as graven images, immaculate in dazzling sun-gold armor.

For these things he had no attention.

It was that which occupied the very center of the gloomy hall which seized and held his fascinated gaze.

A tall, tall chair of scarlet crystal, three times human height.

And in the chair . . . a man was seated.

10. Burning Eyes

ZAZAMANC had the appearance of a slim, tall, youthful man with strong arms, long legs, and a coldly beautiful face which bore no slightest sign of age.

He was attired in complicated and fantastic garments of many colors: puce, canary, blood-scarlet, lavender, mauve, subtle grey, deep violet.

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His raiment was unlike any costume that Thongor had ever seen or heard of. Tight hose clothed his long slender legs; a tunic or jerkin, gathered and tucked and folded according to the dictates of some alien fashion, adorned his torso; sleeves of various lengths protruded one from the other. Long gloves were drawn over his lean strong hands, and strange rings of metal and stone and crystal twinkled and flashed as he moved his fingers.

A cowl, trimmed with strange purple fur, was drawn about his head but did not cover his face.

His face held and fascinated the boy. It was of a supernal, an unhuman, beauty. A high, broad white brow, arched and silken-black eyebrows, long imperial nose, firm, delicately-modeled chin, thin-lipped but exquisitely-carved mouth—these were his features.

They were flawless; without blemish. No wrinkle marred the purity of that godlike brow. No slightest shade of emotion lent warmth to the cold perfection of that face. It was like an idealized sculpture: cold, beautiful, pure, but inhuman.

It was the eyes alone that held life and expression.

Strange eyes were . . . black and cold as frozen ink . . . depthless as bottomless pits . . . cold and deep, but burning with a fierce, unholy flame of vitality.

Behind their enigmatic gaze the boy somehow sensed a vast, cool, limitless intellect as far removed from the ordinary mind of mankind as man is from, say, the grovelling insects or the squirming serpents.

They brought him before the tall scarlet throne and he stood erect and unbowing as that black, burning gaze swept him slowly from head to foot. With careful, judicious deliberation the Veiled Enchanter scanned him slowly.

When he spoke, and then only, did Thongor understand his cognomen. For, from brow to chin, his coldly perfect visage was delicately veiled behind a transparent membrane of some slight fabric, thin almost to the point of invisibility. Why a man should wear a veil which veiled nothing, and through which the eye could clearly seen, was but the least of the mysteries Thongor had yet encountered in this tiny world of magic and beauty and depraved horror.

"It is a savage boy; doubtless from the Northlands; I believe I recall a race of strong Barbarians who dwelt of old on the wintry tundras of that portion of Lemuria," the Enchanter said idly. His voice was like his face: cold, perfect, clear, but devoid of warmth or animation.

"I recall the race; but that was . . . long ago."

For an instant it seemed to Thongor that the black flame of those eyes bore within their fierce depths a measureless weariness, an age-old boredom. Perhaps even something of—futility?

"He is young and strong, bred of brave warriors, I doubt me not. It might be amusing to see that strength . . . take him hence to the Arena Master. We shall see this youthful prowess on the Day of the Opal Vapors. Take him away now . . ."

The guards saluted with mechanical perfection, and led Thongor from the silent hall.

Behind, sitting tall and straight and regal in the scarlet chair, the Veiled Enchanter continued staring straight ahead, into nothingness, with no expression on his cold and beautiful

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face.

11. In The Speculum

ZAZAMANC STOOD in his magical laboratorium. Corrosive vapors swirled about him, caught in twisted tubes of lucent glass. Fiery liquors seethed in crucibles of lead over weird fires of glowing minerals. Trapped forever between two panes of quartz, a mad phantasm screamed soundlessly, caught in a two-dimensional hell. Strange and terrible was this place of many magicks: the air stank of dire wizardries; the brimstone odors of The Pit reeked therein.

The square stone chamber was oddly lit. Wandering, ghostly globes of insubstantial luminance drifted like bubbles of light, to and fro, ice-blue, scarlet, blinding white.

Their shifting radiance cast eerie black shadows crawling over the uneven walls, clustering like frightened bats in the darkest corners.

A vast globe of silvery metal bore a strange image: a huge insectoid thing, with a naked, exposed, and swollen brain, and black, glittering, compound eyes, squatting in green caverns of porous rock; where glassy stalactites and strange crystal outcroppings caught and flickered with vagrant wisps of light.

This was one of the Insect Philosophers who dwelt in the dead core of earth's Moon, and with whom, by his art, Zazamanc sometimes conversed.

With a white crawling fungoid intelligence, on the twilight zone of the planet Mercury, he also communicated betimes; and with a crystalloid but sentinent mineral being on one of the moons of Saturn.

The insectoid thing with the monstrous brain faded slowly from the surface of the silver sphere.

The image was replaced with a different scene. A sweltering area of burning sand whereon a half-naked boy struggled with a huge crimson beast. Zazamanc drew in his breath sharply, watching in suspense. The boy held, for weapon, a hooked sickle. His wild black mane streamed about his yelling, contorted face; his strange gold eyes blazed lion-like through the tangle of his locks.

The crimson thing roared and foamed, and batting wildly at the nimble, leaping figure with heavy paws bladed with black claws like scythed razors. At length the boy darted within the reach of those grasping arms.

Zazamanc sucked in his breath and held it.

The sickle flashed, catching the light, as it swung in a wicked arc. It slashed through the distended throat of the roaring crimson brute and in an instant it lay gasping out bubbling gore on the wet sands, while Thongor stood panting, sweaty, streaming with blood, but triumphant.

Zazamanc uttered a curse and permitted the image to lapse into its component atoms of light. The surface of the silver sphere went blank and dull.

Turning away from the speculum, the Veiled Enchanter crossed the cluttered, crowded chamber to a huge desk that was a cube of grey, cracked stone. Atop this a jumble of parchment scrolls lay sprawled in a litter of amulets, periapts, talismanic rings, and instruments peculiar to the magician's art.

Shoving aside two of these, an arthame and a bolline, the Enchanter uncovered a vast and ponderous book.

This tome was of peculiar and alien worksmanship: no terrene product of

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the bookwright's art, surely. The leaves were bound between two plates of perdurable metal, but a rare, unearthly metal, blue as sapphire stone, and filled with radiant flakes of gold light. The twin plates were deeply embossed with large glyphs of geometric complexity. And the leaves within were even more strange: of flexive lucent stuff, glassy and crystalline and yet supple.

The pentacles, wherewith these leaves were inscribed, were of red-orange, green-black, silver, violet, and a strange throbbing color that seemed somehow to belong between the hues of heliotrope and jasper, but which was a color not elsewise found on earth and belonging to no spectrum of normal light.

In some odd fashion, these magical diagrams had been inked *within* the very substance of the flexible crystal leaves.

Zazamanc opened the ponderous volume and began an intent perusal of the sorcerous lore.

The boy Thongor must die. And in a grim and bloody manner.

And—soon!

But *how?*

12. Jothar Jorn

THE ARENA stood on the further edge of the city of Ithomaar, a vast, circular amphitheatre like an enormous crater. This bowl-shaped depression had been scooped out of the ground by captive genii, its sloping sides terraced into tiers and fitted out with curved marble benches. The gladiators themselves, and the cages that held the beasts they were to fight against, dwelt in subterranean crypts below the arena floor. To these, the bird-masked and unspeaking warriors conducted the youthful Barbarian.

They brought him to a huge, fat, half-naked man who had been working out with the swordsmen. He was crimson from his exertions, his massive torso glittering with sweat, and as Thongor came up to him he was towelling himself dry and emptying an enormous drinking-horn filled with dark ale. One of the bird-guards proffered a slim ivory tablet to him. It was inscribed with a brief directive, written in emerald inks, in queer, hooked characters such as the barbarian boy had never before seen. The man scrutinized them quickly, then raised thoughtful, curious eyes to Thongor.

"A Northlanderman, eh? Tall for your age, and built like a young lion. Well, cub, I doubt not those strong arms will provide merry entertainment for our Lord, come the Day of Opal Vapors!" His voice was hearty and genial, and his great, broken-nosed slab of a face, beefy-red, glistening with perspiration, was cheerful and honest. His little eyes were light blue and good-humored. Thongor rather liked the look of him, and slightly relaxed his stiff, guarded stance. The other noted this, and chuckled.

"My name is Jothar Jorn, and I be games-master to the pleasure of our Lord," he said. "You've naught to fear from me, lion-cub, so long as you do as you be told, and quick about it, too."

"I am Thongor of Valkarth," the boy said. The games-master nodded, looking him over with quick, keen eyes.

"Valkarth: I might have guessed, from the color of those eyes. Snow Bear tribe?"

Thongor bristled and a red glare came into his strange gold eyes. "My people were the Black Hawk clan, and the Snow Bear tribe were

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—are—their enemies," he said fiercely. The big man eyed him with frank, friendly curiosity.

"You be somewhat mixed on your tenses, lad. 'Were—are'—which would you have?"

Thongor's head drooped slightly and his broad young shoulders slumped. In a flat, listless voice he said: "My people are dead, fallen in battle before the dogs of the Snow Bear; my father, my brothers . . ."

A sympathy rare in this primitive age shone in the small blue eyes of the big man. "*All* . . . of your people slain in war by the other tribe?" he asked in low, subdued tones.

Thongor's head came up proudly and his shoulders went back. "All are dead; I am the last Black Hawk," he said bleakly.

"Well . . . well . . ." Jothar Jorn cleared his throat loudly, and shook himself a little. "In that case, you will be hungry," he said in his hearty way. "Hungry enough to—eat a Snow Bear, shall we be saying?"

The boy grinned soberly, then laughed. And they went in to dinner.

Jothar Jorn bade an underling lead the Barbarian to the commonroom where the gladiators ate at long benches, and set a repast before him such as the boy had not seen for weeks. A succulent steak, rare and bloody, swimming in its own steaming juices, tough black bread and ripe fruit and a tankard full of heady ale. Thongor fell on this feast ravenously, reflecting that if *this* was captivity, then it might not be so bad, after all.

13. The Pits of Ithomaar

TEN DAYS PASSED, and busy days there were. As a newcomer to the City in the Jewel, Thongor was curious about everything and kept his eyes and ears open. He soon learned that Jothar Jorn had entered the magic crystal only twenty years before: he had been games-master of the arena of Tsargol, a seacoast city far to the south, head of an expedition into the mountain country of Mommur trapping beasts for use in the games then to be held in celebration of the coronation of Sanjar Thal, Sark of Tsargol. He, too, had glimpsed the Jewel from afar, having left his trappers behind, hot in pursuit of a mountain dragon, and had been caught by the sirenic lure of the crystal even as had the Valkarthan boy.

As for the gladiators he trained, they were all Ithomaar-born and knew nothing of the outer world from which Thongor and Jothar Jorn had come. The boy soon found his place among them, but not without a few lumps and bruises. For the most part, the gladiators of Ithomaar the Eternal were full-grown men, and a mere stripling cast into their midst was fair game for a bit of good-natured hazing. But the young Barbarian did not take very well to the playful rough-house in the manner to which his fellow-gladiators were by now accustomed.

The first man who tried to shove the boy around was a big, cold-eyed bully named Zed Zomis, the acknowledged leader of the gladiators. He ended up flat in the corner with his jaw broken in three places and a mouthfull of shattered teeth—for all that he was ten years older than the boy Thongor, a head taller, and outweighed him by thirty pounds.

Three of Zed Zomis' comrades, who had gathered to watch their leader have a little fun with the surly outlander youth, promptly jumped on the wild boy from behind when they saw him dispose of their friend. Within the first few seconds of the tussel they discovered they had

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picked a fight with a lion-cub in very truth. The *vandar*, as the jet-black lion of the Lemurian forest-country was called, is twelve feet of steely, sinewy strength from fanged jaw to lashing tail-tip, and a juggernaut of fighting fury: and Jothar Jorn had nick-named the young Barbarian aptly.

To a boy from the savage Northlands, war is a way of life, and, for all his young years, the Valkarthan lad was no stranger to the red art, having been raised virtually from the cradle with a weapon in his fist. Northlandermen of Thongor's people dwell in a bleak and hostile land of bitter wintry snows, and life is one savage and unending struggle against rapacious brutes, scarcely less-rapacious human foes, and Nature herself, who is cruel and harsh towards weaklings north of the Mountains of Mommur.

Thus, to Thongor, fighting was no game but deadly serious. And no one attacks a warrior of his kind in play, only in earnest. Thus, when Zed Zomis' bully-boys sprang upon him from behind, it was no mere laughing tussel he gave them, but a grim, vicious battle to the death, from which they emerged with a number of broken bones; and one of them, at least, would limp forever.

Thus he made for himself a place in the Pits of Ithomaar, and it was a place of considerable respect. The gladiators treated him with care thereafter, and not a few of them were quick to hail him as a friend. As for Thongor, he bore no ill-will to the four men he had beaten and was as ready to be friends with them as with any man who treated him with dignity.

The boy thrived on the hearty meals the gladiators were served. These consisted of immense steaks swimming in hot gravy, raw vegetables, sweet pastries and a variety of good, strong wines. Of this menu, the last two items were new to his experience, and after a prolonged bout with the winecups, from which he emerged a bit unsure of his footing and with a head, the next morning, that throbbed with queasy pain, he treated the fruit of the vine with much the same gingerly respect with which the older gladiators had learned to treat him.

From Jothar Jorn he learned something of the fighting skills as practiced by civilized men. The warriors of the Black Hawk clan had schooled him in the use of bow and arrow, spear and javelin, war-axe and, of course, in the art of using the great two-handed broadsword. He missed that broadsword, taken from him by the bird-masked guardsmen when they captured him. The sword was old, ancient, really, and it had passed down his line from father to eldest son from time immemorial. Some said the great sword—its name was *Sarkozan*—had been wielded by none other than Valkh the Black Hawk himself, the famous hero who had been the founder of Thongor's nation—Valkh, Valkh of Nemedis, one of the immortal heroes who went up against the Dragon Kings at the close of The Thousand-Year War—Valkh, who was of the blood of Phondath the Firstborn, in the twentieth generation of the direct male line.

That sword had, ages agone, drunk of the blood of the Dragon Kings, reaping a red harvest there on the black beaches of Grimstrand Firth. Mayhap the Nineteen Gods themselves had blest it, when the heroes went up from Nemedis in the Last Battle, for it is written in *The Lemurian Chronicles* how of old They went

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among the men of the First Kingdoms.

Jothar Jorn trained the savage boy in such "civilized" weapons as dirk and dag, rapier and hooksword, cutlass and scimitar. But the strong hands of the Valkarthan yearned for the loved, familiar heft of Sarkozan. And at last he revolted.

"But, cub! We don't fight with broadswords in Ithomaar—and, look, you can have your pick of weapons," the games-master argued with the youth. Thongor set his jaw grimly.

"They have taken my sword from me. I want it back," he said stubbornly. Something in the set of that jaw and the stubborn glint in those blazing eyes told Jothar Jorn it did no good to argue, but argue he did, and plead, and even threaten. But to all his bellowings and coaxings, Thongorm made but one reply:

"They have taken my sword from me. I want it back."

At length, Jothar Jorn talked himself hoarse and gave up. Who could say? Maybe a Barbarian brandishing a broadsword would be a sensation in the Games. At least it would be—different.

"Get him his sword," he said, and shrugged, and left.

14. The Secret Gate

NOW THAT Sarkozan was in his possession once again, Thongor began to plan his escape. He had no idea how he had come here, but he intended to return to the world he knew, one way or another. He was willing to die trying. For besides his appetite for red meat, his berserker courage, and his fighting ferocity, he shared another trait with the great cats of the jungle: he would not be shut in a cage. And Ithomaar was a cage—a very beautiful one, but a cage nonetheless. He had taken the measure of the folk of this fabulous realm, and he did not like what he saw, neither the dainty, gilded fops of the court who came to watch the gladiators at sword practice because it titilated them to see real men work up a sweat in brutal combat, nor the common-folk of the city's hops and ways, with their listless faces, dead eyes, and hearts empty of hope.

The Pits were not guarded because there was no need to guard them. They were underground, hewn by invisible hands from solid bedrock, and there was no escape. Most gladiators never thought of trying to escape, because the life they had here was better than the one they had escaped from, with excitement and pride in their prowess, good meat and drink, and even women, occasionally brought in to serve their needs. But even at seventeen, Thongor knew he would rather die than live in a cage.

It was not long before he discovered the door in the wall. It was a slab of brassy orichalc and it bore, embossed upon its center panel, a hieroglyph whose meaning he did not know. What interested him was that the door was unlocked, had, in fact, no lock. In a roundabout way he questioned the other gladiators about it, eliciting little information. It was on the lowest level of the Pits and it was behind the beast-cages. Finally, drinking wine with Jothar Jorn who had taken a liking to him, he mentioned the door. The brawny games-master stiffened, his good-humored slab of a face paling.

"You do not be wantin' to find out what's behind that door, cub. Never go near it!" he grunted, eyes sober and almost fearful.

"I do not understand why it has no lock," Thongor said. "Where does it

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lead?"

"To the Tower of Skulls," said Jothar Jorn. And that was all he would say. His warning meant nothing to Thongor; the young Barbarian knew only that it must lead down into the city itself, for there was no tower near the arena. Once in the city, he knew it should not be difficult for him to escape to the woodlands beyond, for Ithomaar the Eternal had no walls, which meant no gates, which meant no guards.

So that very night he made the attempt. He had eaten a good dinner at the long tables of scarlet *lotifer* wood with his comrades, but some of the meat and bread and fruit he had not eaten, but had hidden away in a sack he had fashioned from a scrap of cloth and kept hidden behind his cloak. As his comrades strolled into the commonroom, where lutes-players and dancing girls waited to entertain them at their wine, he sought out the jakes and, once alone in the winding corridors of stone, turned aside to the level of the beast-cages and the secret door of orichalc that went unguarded and unlocked.

He thrust the door open, finding a long narrow corridor of damp stone. He went in, the door closing softly behind him.

He went forward, the great Valkarthan broadsword naked in his hand.

15. The Thing in the Smoke

IN A VAST CHAMBER beneath the Tower of Skulls, Zazamanc the Veiled Enchanter sat enthroned in Power.

This throne stood on a dais composed of nine tiers of black marble, and it was carven from the ivory of mastodons. Set within the broad arms of this throne were the sigils whereby the Veiled Enchanter summoned the demons and genii and elementals that served his wishes in all things. At this hour he wore the Green Robe of Conjuration, and his left hand was set upon Ouphonx, the ninth sigil of the planet Saturn, which the Lemurians of this age knew by another name. Under his right hand lay Zoär, the third sigil of the Moon. Before him, on a tabouret of jet, lay the Crossed Swords and the wand called Imgoth.

Amulets were clasped about his wrists and throat. Pendent upon his brow hung the talisman the grimoires name Arazamyon, and upon it a certain Name was writ in runes fashioned of small black pearls.

The face of Zazamanc went masked this day behind a single tissue of pale green gauze; through it the cold pallor of his handsome visage gleamed like an ivory mask, and his eyes glittered with frozen malice.

Sprawled upon the lower tiers of the dais lay the naked body of a sixteen-year-old slave girl, and beneath it a wet scarlet pool spread slowly. Beside the corpse lay a razory dirk that had, only a few moments before, cut her heart from her naked breast. As for the heart itself, it had been hurled—a gory dripping thing, still warm and throbbing with unquenched vitality—into an immense bowl of bronze, curiously engraven, wherein red flames slithered slowly.

Seated rigidly in his ivory throne, the Veiled Enchanter now called upon the Name Alzarpha. As the echoes of that name died shuddering in the rafters of the high-roofed chamber, he began to ennunciate in solemn, portentious tones the frightful names of the genii that ruled the Twenty-Eight Mansions of the Moon. Strange and uncouth were these names; many were never meant to be spoken aloud by the lips of men, and these were difficult to pronounce. However, as

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the green-robed figure spake them one by one, the red flames that crawled and rustled within the brazen bowl turned first a sickly yellow and then a virulent green, the color of pus and corruption and decay.

From the ensorcelled flames there began to issue forth a thick, oily smoke. It coiled through the darkness of the mighty chamber, heavy and sooty, and within it was the stench of hell.

". . . Zargiel! . . . Maldruim! . . . Phonthon! . . . Ziminar!" Name after name came rolling from the Enchanter's lips in slow thunder. As they rang through the somber silence of the subterranean vault, the nauseous vapor grew dense, coalesced, and began to assume shape and substance. Gradually there took form a weird, towering figure that loomed up against the gloomy rafters far above.

Thrice the height of mortal man it was, and manlike in form, but only in that it stood erect upon two limbs and had a single head. For it was gaunt as a dead thing, covered with grey, greasy hide, wrinkled and bewarted like that of a toad.

This demon was known to the grimoires as Xarxus of the Crawling Eye and the Veiled Enchanter had long since bound it to his service by a terrible and unbreakable vow. Its long, lean arms ended in grisly pincers, like a gigantic crab, and its head was unspeakably hideous. But one eye it had, and that was a hollow, fleshy pit from whose center slim tendrils sprouted: these flexed and slithered in a loathsome manner, and from this repellent and unnatural organ the demon's name was derived.

"I have the boy," Zazamanc said, when the demon had taken form. "But I cannot comprehend your warnings concerning him: he knows naught of me and is but a rough, untutored savage. I want you to read the future again, to discern if by his capture I have altered or averted the doom whereof you have foretold."

The demon stared down at him, tendrils crawling in the hideous, empty socket that was it sonly eye. When the tall thing spoke it was in a voice deeper than ever came from human throat, but curiously flat and unresonant. It spake even though it had nothing remotely resembling a mouth, but this did not disturb Zazamanc, who knew that such as Xarxus did not require organs of speech but could resonate the very molecules of the air itself, or cause their thoughts to sound within the minds of those with whom they had uncanny converse.

I have warned you against having aught to do with this one, the demon said. *I have foretold that there approacheth down the paths of future time one who is destined to be your bane and the cause of your death. You would be wise to send him hence from this universe you rule.*

Brooding upon his ivory throne, Zazamanc seemed not to have heard the words of the demon.

"You can see further into future events than can I," he mused. "In my Speculum I have foreseen what will eventuate if he fights in the arena against my monstrous hybrids: his fighting prowess is such that he will escape victorious from every combat, if permitted an even chance and a good weapon. But it would be so easy to slay him . . ."

The demon shook its awful head, a familiar human gesture suddenly made horrible by his lack of human features. *There is little of the future that I may foretell with any degree of certitude, but this much I can say: the*

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life of that one is linked with your own, and if you slay him, or order him slain, or set him in such danger that his death ensues, your own death will follow swiftly.

Naked fear glittered in the cold, inscrutable eyes of the Veiled Enchanter. His death was the one thing in all the many worlds and universes that he feared, for he knew all too well that which would befall him thereafter, and his soul shrank shuddering from the knowledge. His gloved hands crawled uneasily on the arms of his throne.

"Why do you refuse to read my future in any detail?" he queried in a thin, petulant voice. "You are bound to serve my will by the nature of the vow between us . . ."

It is not that I refuse, but that I am unable to comply, the demon said. *You are naught but a human, for all your magistry, and the true nature of time remains hidden from your knowledge, a secret shared only between the Lords of Light and . . . mine own kind. Know, then, that time is like unto a maze of many thousand intersecting paths: at each single step you face a choice of paths to follow. Which path you may select in any given instance may be calculated, but to project the pattern of your choices further into the maze involves a geometric progression of possible choices, until the further ahead one seeks to predict, one is baffled before an infinite multiplicity of possible paths.*

"Read, then, what you can of my future," Zazamanc commanded.

Xarxus complied. *Every mortal hath seven assassins, appointed by inscrutable Fate to be his doom. One or another or a third he may elude. Few men elude all seven. The youth you have so unwisely drawn into your realm beyond space will be the doom of Zazamanc.*

"Then I will slay him first! And thus avert the destiny you foretell for me . . ."

The crawling eye of the demon stared at him sightlessly, tendrils writhing obscenely in the naked socket.

Death has never entered this universe of yours, Xarxus said tonelessly. *Gladiators mangled in the arena regain their strength, their torn flesh knits: even this girl-child whose heart you fed into the flames will rise again. To strike down the savage boy with a bolt of force would be to let Death in . . . and once Death has entered here, he will not willingly leave. Beware, O Zazamanc, and guard thy portals well: for too long have you evaded the hand of the Destroyer of All, and he shall seek you out if once you let him in . . .*

With those words, the demon began to crumble and disperse, his pseudobody dissolving into the primal elements from which he had been formed. Zazamanc sat stiff and straight, his face an expressionless mask. But his eyes were shadowed with a terrible fear. He knew that a magician may defend his mortality with a thousand spells, but that the Powers that rule Creation have foreseen a loophole through even the most cunning defense. He knew, as well, that it is forbidden to flesh and blood to assume the prerogatives of divinity, the first of which is life eternal. And however a wizard prolongs his life through arcane science, he never loses the dread of death; quite the contrary—the longer he lives, the more he savors life.

Zazamanc was afraid—for the first time in uncountable ages.

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16. The Edge of the World

THE SECRET PASSAGE was interminable. As Thongor prowled its length, Sarkozan naked in his hand, he expected to be attacked at any moment, but no such attack came. Doubtless the Veiled Enchanter used this tunnel to communicate with the beast-cages, wherein many of his most extraordinary hybrid monsters awaited their turn on the sands of the arena. It was unlocked and unguarded for the simple reason that no one would dare disturb the privacy of Zazamanc and rouse his enmity by using it. But Thongor dared!

At last he came to its end, and found a sliding panel that opened into an immense hall—the same hall in which he had first been imprisoned. This vast, shadowy place must, then, be within the Tower of Skulls.

The boy stood, glaring about him into shadows, the great sword naked in his fist. If he could find his way out of here, he thought it likely he could escape from the city unseen and undetected, for Ithomaar had no gates or walls to detain him, and every boulevard led to the green fields and feathery forests beyond, and thence to the world's edge itself—the narrow, circular horizon of lambent vapor that marked the terminus of this microcosmos.

And were he to reach the world's edge uncaptured—what then? How to find his way back through the enchanted crystal to the land of Lemuria? The boy shook his shoulders, growling deep in his chest: it was not the way of the Black Hawk warriors to gnaw at more than one problem at a time. He would find or fight his way to the limits of this artificial world, and then worry about a way beyond it.

Suddenly he was not alone.

He knew it by the prickling of his nape-hairs, the way a jungle beast senses the presence of danger. The boy whirled in a fighting crouch, the broadsword flashing in his hand—to stare into the cold, inhumanly perfect visage of the Veiled Enchanter.

Zazamanc had coalesced from invisible air soundlessly, but the keen senses of the savage had detected his presence. In his right hand the magician bore an ominous baton of black wood, carven with twisting runes and capped at both ends with ferrous metal. Thongor would not have known it for a weapon, but such it was. It was the wand called Bazlimoth, the Blasting Rod. Within it, lightnings slumbered.

"You are strayed from the Pits, child," said the Enchanter in a cold, remote voice. Thongor made no reply, but his strange gold eyes blazed lion-like through tangled locks and his weight was on the balls of his feet, ready for action.

The Enchanter slowly extended the black wand until its tip pointed at Thongor's breast. The cunning brain of the Enchanter seethed in a turmoil of unanswered queries—*had* the demon lied to him? How could the destruction of the wild boy bring about his own doom? True, Death had never entered here, but what of that? He could shrivel the boy to ash in an instant—and how could the act endanger him? Upon his cold lips a Word formed unspoken; suddenly the wand was vibrant with force. It throbbed in his hand like a live thing, eager to kill.

And in that instant a hand fell upon his arm and Zazamanc shrank with amazement and fury to find the faceless horror of old Yllimdus by his side. In his frenzy to blast down the Barbarian, he had forgot that his

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former councilor was imprisoned in this hall by his order. He shrugged off the hand of Yllimdus, his perfect visage a mask of fury. The old man fell back so that he stood between the rage of Zazamanc and the Valkarthan youth.

"Your end is near, Zazamanc," the old man said. "Your reign is over. Slay not this child, but permit him to return to the outer world from which you drew him: do this, and you may yet live."

"You dare lay hands upon your master?" Zazamanc cried, trembling with wrath. "Stand aside, fool, or die with him you would shield in your folly!"

"I do not fear death, for it is but an end to an existence of weary torment," the old man said quietly. "It is *you* who fear, for all too well do you know what will follow in the instant of your demise."

Zazamanc flinched at these words, for he had never dreamt his councillors knew the nature of the vow between himself and Xarxus; for the demon was sworn to serve his will during his life, but upon the moment of his death, his spirit would enter the service of Xarxus . . . and Zazamanc knew all too well the horrors that awaited him beyond the grave. He shuddered, his face livid and suddenly lined and weary with age, as if his supernaturally-prolonged youthfulness was fading already.

"Die, then, worm!" he snarled, lifting the rod and loosing its dormant fires.

17. Letting Death In

THE SHADOW-THRONGED HALL lit suddenly with a flash of supernal brilliance that seared the eye. A thunderclap shook the domed roof and echoes bounced from wall to wall. Caught full in the fury of the bolt, the faceless man crumpled and fell, robe blackening, breast burnt away, a hideous charred pit.

Old Yllimdus spoke no further word, his head falling to one side as life left his shattered body. Nape-hairs rising with primal awe, Thongor blinked away the after-images of the flash and saw to his astonishment that in the moment of death the flesh mask crawled and shrunk and molded itself into the features of an old man. Noble of brow, weary and lined was that face, but, somehow, at peace.

Zazamanc shrank back at the sight. His enchantment was broken, but he understood it not, for it should have persisted beyond death. A cold hand closed upon his heart, for at last the grim premonition of doom he had for so long denied came home to him. He thrust his hands wide, face a writhing mask of naked fear.

"*No—!*" he shrieked, shrill and weak as a woman.

And in that instant, Thongor struck.

He sprang over the charred corpse of Yllimdus, booming his savage warcry. The great sword flashed as he swung it high above his head and brought it hissing down upon the shrinking, cringing form of the Enchanter.

Zazamanc staggered and fell to his knees, his face a crimson, torn thing. The black baton fell from nerveless fingers and rolled across the stony pave.

On his knees he swayed, staring blindly up into the grim face of the half-naked boy who loomed over him like a vengeful spectre. With quivering fingers he dabbled at his wound, peering in horror at his own blood. His dazed brain could scarcely comprehend what had happened: a thousand spells rendered him im-

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mune to death, invulnerable to assault. The swordblade should have glanced aside from his magically-protected flesh, leaving him unharmed.

Then it was that he saw the great glyphs acid-etched down the blade of the mighty sword, and knew their meaning—knew as well that no mortal hand had drawn those immortal and portentious sigils in the steel of Thongor's sword.

"*Aiii,*" he moaned, rocking to and fro on his knees, while his life's-blood leaked from him, drop by drop; "*Aaiii* . . . it is Sarkozan . . . Sarkozan . . . *Sarkozan, my Bane* . . ."

Again Thongor lifted the broadsword above his head and brought it whistling down. Bone crunched, snapped: gore splattered. The severed head of the Enchanter flew from his shoulders to plop like a grisly fruit against the pave. The headless cadaver fell sideways to sprawl in a spreading pool of scarlet.

Thongor's grim lips tightened. Beneath his bronze tan, his flesh whitened. His burning eyes widened in disbelief.

For even as he watched the bloody head . . . *shriveled*. The flesh tightened—dried—split, and peeled away from raw, naked bone that *browned* in moments. The fleshless skull grinned up at him from the gory pave. Before his unbelieving eyes, the gaunt bone grew pitted and sere; crumbled. The brainpan fell in; the jaw detached to clatter on the stone. In here moments there was naught to be seen but a clutter of bony shards and dry dust . . . it was as if the centuries Zazamanc had denied had come rushing back upon him at the last.

It was even as the demon had warned. Zazamanc had let Death in and it had taken its toll, long overdue, at the end . . .

And Ithomaar was free.

THONGOR stood at the world's edge, where glittering mists roiled and crept endlessly, moving as with a life of their own.

"Will you not come back to the real world with me, Jothar Jorn?" he asked. At his side, the burly gamesmaster rubbed his beefy jaw reflectively.

"I don't know, lion-cub," he grunted. "This world be a fair one, and snug enough, with *Him* gone from it. and belike all my old friends in Tsargol would be gone by now, or that changed with the years I'd not be more than a stranger to them. As for me, well, I'll stay here. Someone must take charge o' things, now; someone must keep order and rule here for those who will not go back to the world outside . . . it might as well be me, me and my stout lads."

"Will many stay, do you think?" the youth asked.

The big man shrugged, grinning. "Belike, some o'them. Many will leave, to find their places in the outer world; but many more will stay, for they were born here, and this be home to them, and a fair place it is, with an end to fear and evil magicking. But what of you, cub? Is't back to the frozen north?"

Thongor stared at the coiling mists, his grim bronze face unreadable.

"There is nothing for me there. Those I loved are dead, all, all of them. I will fare down the pass into the Southlands, to seek my fortune among the bright cities. Surely there will be a place for a man who can use a sword and can face Death unafraid . . ."

Jothar Jorn mused on the tall youth with thoughtful eyes.

"Go, then, lion—cub no more, but a lion now, in truth! And—may you

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find what you're looking for, in the end!"

Thongor clapped his shoulder and turned away, striding into the seething mists and through the magic crystal into the great world that lay beyond, bound for the jungle-clad Southlands and a host of new adventures.

—LIN CARTER

The Church of Pandaemons (cont. from page 21)

have five little ones of whom I am, yes, *very* fond, with promise of a sixth one in nothing flat, that is, in about five weeks three days, give er take a day er two. Say, are those *gongs* them guards are beating? Say, I really must go now. Say, I'll be sure to give your regards to Apollograd. Say, I sure do think—"

In the brief lull following the departure of the Hyperborean Hawk, Yanosh could be heard laboriously counting his take, and then commenting on it, as follows: "They call this alms? Blood of a vixen! May they catch the cholera! Alms, they call this? May an aurochs gore them!" The curses of Yanosh were famous, and known to be as vivid as they were archaic.

AT FIRST SIGHT of him, the bull plunged into a wooded declivity and was lost for the rest of the morning. "Plunged" is perhaps too swift a word. It lumbered. About mid-afternoon he was able to obtain brief and broken glimpses with his binoculars. About mid-morning of the second day, it came slowly up and out of the declivity, and began to graze. And by the third morning it came up to him, very, very shyly, and accepted a lump of salt.

It was a bull, and an old bull, a very old bull indeed; and it was huge, even though its head with the huge and vast-spread horns seldom raised up even to shoulder-level. And it smelled, Lord God how it smelled!

When the old Warden shambled over, a little before noon, it merely acknowledged him with a glance and a flick of the tail. "I take the liberty, High-born Sir and Noble Doctor, of bringing you some lunch, same as yesterday," said the old Warden. "Since you was so good as to accept of it yesterday and the day before. Today being your last day," he said, with respectful and sympathetic firmness. "Three days being the term stated in your honorable pass."

"Yes, yes," said Eszterhazy. "Thank you very much indeed. No need to worry. I'll leave at sundown. I fully appreciate the privilege." The great and ancient beast nuzzled his hand, and was rewarded with some thinly-shaven slices of apple.

"That's a old beast, sir," said the Warden. "It's 'most thirty year old. There was a half-a-dozen when first I come here, but, somehow, they others all died off. Don't know if there is another anywhere, I don't."

"There isn't," said Eszterhazy. He never took his eyes off it.

The old man breathed noisily for a few minutes. Then he nodded. "The only other visitor ever allowed," he said, "was the King of Illyria. Didn't stay long, on finding our Sovereign Lord the King-Emperor wasn't going to let him shoot at it; fancy! —Ah—now it's come to me. What it's called. 'Old Methusaleh,' of course, that's only our name for it. The *kind* of animal it is," he said. "is a aurochs."

Eszterhazy never took his eyes from it. "Yes," he said, after a moment; "I know."

—AVRAM DAVIDSON

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George Alec Effinger returns with a surreal Socratic dialogue in which all is not as it appears . . .

LYDECTES: ON THE NATURE OF SPORT

GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER

Illustrated by JOE STATON

(Office of His Democratic Dignity,
The Representative of North America

To the Representative of Europe, greetings:

Dear Chuck:

Enclosed you'll find a rough translation of that ms. one of my boys brought back from some planet or other, let me see . . . yeah, the star was Wolf 359, the planet was B. I don't remember authorizing that job. Was it one of our joint ventures? Anyway, my team reported finding extensive ruins of some kind of honest and true civilization, but no living things at all. Too bad. Especially if the damn computer's evaluations can be trusted. I don't know about that machine. TECT was a great idea, I guess, and it's a nice plaything for my boys, but I can do without the second-guessing. I mean, after all, if you're going to be an autocrat, you ought to be a real autocrat. TECT takes a little of the fun out of it, if you know what I mean. I suppose you do.

This ms. I'm talking about has my boys all excited. We held on to it for I don't know how long before TECT worried a clue out of it. Now my team says it has the ms. all figured out, and what I'm sending you is the offical-for-now version. If anything changes in the next few weeks, I'll let you know. What's fair is fair, I always say, and you never know when I might want something you have. You can't say I don't lay them right out on the table, can you?

Regards to Cindy.

Best, Tom)

AT THE CONCLUSION of the comedy, the actors removed their masks and waited for their due. We applauded and shouted praises, particularly for Melos, whom we all understood to be consumed with a strange fever, a symptom of his advanced age perhaps, or a curse from him who striked from afar. Nevertheless, it was commonly agreed that Melos had given a performance worthy of the daughters of Memory themselves, and we in the amphitheater felt privileged to be allowed to observe. After a time, though, my companion and I decided to leave our seats and walk back toward the center of the city, where we maintain our modest dwelling, even though I am king of this proud land.

"King Herodes," said Dimenes, my

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friend, "why is it that a man like Melos performs, even though he is ravaged by illness, and stands to gain nothing but an ephemeral sort of fame?"

"That is difficult to answer, Dimenes," I said. "As we walk along these mist-shined streets, perhaps you can help me unravel that mystery."

"I doubt that indeed," said Dimenes. "I cannot believe that such as I can be of aid to a philosopher king."

I laughed. Before we had even left the grounds of the theater, my companion and I were joined by several young men of the city, among them Polytarsus son of Proctis, Baion of Memnaris, Lactymion son of Irion, Stabo of Herra, and others.

(Okay, Chuck, does this look the least bit familiar to you? The names are different, and the subject is new, but doesn't it kind of ring a bell? Think, Chuck. Remember Mr. Martinez? Philosophy 101A? Sophomore year? We had to read that stuff, and we made all those dumb remarks in class, and he was going to report us to the dean. I always wondered what happened to Mr. Martinez. Now that, as it happens, I'm the sole authority on this continent, I guess I could look up old Mr. Martinez and make him nervous. But that's beside the point.

This ms. was discovered in a sealed container made of titanium alloy. Along with the ms. was a map, a candle, and a bundle of stuff that apparently was some kind of offering—flowers or fruit or something like that. Now, the important thing to note, and I'm sure you will, is that the map I mentioned was of the Earth. The cylindrical titanium container was found in what looked like a ruined temple. My boys dated the contents. They are over five thousand years old.

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What was a map of the Earth doing on Wolf 359, Planet B, five thousand years ago? Aha.)

"GREETINGS, King Herodes," said Lactymion son of Irion. His manner was open and friendly, in a way that has endeared him to all the most influential men of our city. He dispensed with the false humility and deference with which a king in other lands is often treated, for I had made it clear in the early part of my reign that I considered myself to be an administrator only, with no special claim to personal honor. I am pleased that my company is desired more for intellectual discussion than for the selfish seeking of favors.

"Good evening to you, fair Lactymion," I said. "Has your father accompanied you? It would indeed be a shame if he missed Melos' grand performance."

"I am afraid that my ancient father will see few festivals to come. He is confined to his bed, on the orders of the physicians."

"I am truly sorry to hear that."

"We are just speaking about Melos," said my friend Dimenes. "I asked King Herodes why an old man like Melos would exert himself so, when it is common knowledge throughout our city that he is near the grave himself, and that the best thing for it would be a regimen of complete rest and quiet."

"Perhaps," said Stabo of Herra, a crude fellow and a bore, "he had to put on the mask and phallus one last time. There is no accounting for the follies of the senile." The remainder of our party ignored the words of Stabo.

(We have guys like this Stabo today, and they're governing billions of people, not that I'd mention any names. Stabo was just born in the wrong place in the wrong time. I guess. Just goes to show you, Chuck. Remind me to tell you what Denny was up to this morning.

My boys asked TECT, of course, about the similarity between this King Herodes and our own good old Plato. Well, seeing as how TECT is the repository of everything there is to know, final and ultimate synthesizer of all knowledge, TECT came up with a pretty outrageous answer. TECT has a way of doing that. Did you know that one of my boys asked TECT "What is God?" a couple of months ago? Can you imagine what the answer was? No, you can't. One long, I mean huge *chemical formula. A structural formula that runs on in very fine print for 3,370 computer printout pages. You can guess how this excited my team. They're busy right now, building one. A God, that is. They divided that, uh, ungodly formula into pieces, wherever they decided one chunk could be joined to another with a simple peptide bond (you do remember peptide bonds, don't you? Mrs. Assad, Chem 110B). It appear that God is a ketone. That's funny. I always thought a ketone was a kind of wall paint. Or Pennsylvania, the Ketone State. Ha ha. My boys tell me that the formula is, let me see– I'm checking my notes here—an asymmetric hydrocarbon. That means that if you made a mirror image of the formula, the two wouldn't be "superimposable". That's why I can't give you a copy of the formula; my team tells me that if there were the slightest error, typographical or otherwise, there would be no telling what you'd build. Pandemonium, in the truest sense. And who needs three Gods? Two will be quite sufficient)*

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"IT MAY BE of value," said a young member of our party, as we turned the corner of the Panta and strolled across the neutral square before the thieves' quarter, "to examine the nature of all entertainments, to see what they have in common that so drives men to participate, as much as it drives such as we to observe."

"A very fine idea," I said, peering at the young man who had just spoken. Dimenes saw my perplexed expression, I suppose, for he made an introduction.

"My king," said my old friend, "this lad is Lydectes, son of Auguron, leader of the Logic party in Carbba. You may recall how this young man's father aided you during your long war against the Suprina's bandits."

"Ah, yes," I said. I was somewhat amazed, for I had last seen this same Lydectes wrapped in a blanket, held in his mother's arms. "It has been a long time, indeed, but I am glad that our ways have crossed. I suggest that we follow your idea. Does anyone have an objection?"

There was silence from our group, and the only sounds were the gentle slapping noises of our leather sandals upon the slick surface of the paving-stones.

"Then let us begin with a definition."

(Sometimes he sounds a little like you, no offense. How you ended up ruling Europe, I'll never know. You and me and Denny ought to trade continents, you know that? You'd be happy in Asia, sitting around and making obscure but philosophic-sounding pronouncements. And I'd love to move my stuff to Majorca. But that would leave Denny here, wouldn't it? Gee, I'd hate to see what he'd do with his sneakiness and my resources. He's bad enough already. And besides, I don't know what Ed and Nelson would say.

Which brings up an interesting thought. Remember when we eliminated the sixth Representative? Everybody except Stan thought it was a great idea: consolidating forces, reducing duplication of effort, etc. Well, maybe it's time for a little more consolidating. I could consolidate Nelson, down in South America. And you could consolidate Ed in Africa. That would give us a lot more bargaining power with Denny, wouldn't it? Think it over)

"INDEED," said Lydectes, that admirable youth, "give us a definition of sport, a broad definition that entails every sort of entertainment, and we will see if we can find fault. Perhaps in that way we will arrive at a meaningful approximation of what sport means to us, and what proper place it has in the affairs of men."

Once more Stabo of Herra spoke up. "I have an idea," he said, though he had few listeners. "Let us find an inexpensive leaf house."

(At this point, you are probably wondering just what a leaf house is. I did, too, and I asked my boys. After sifting all the material from this Planet B, they came up with a probable answer. That's all I ever get from them, probable answers. Even with TECT's infallible brain; my boys feel a little threatened by that machine, you see, so they always hedge TECT's decrees with some nebulous preface of their own. Do you have the same trouble? Anyway, apparently there was this ancient sculpture or something, I don't really care, and one of my top men said it showed 1) a young man; 2) what appeared to be a pile of leaves; and 3) what appeared to be

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either a serving maiden on her hands and knees or a German shepherd. That's just what he said, I swear. Now you understand how Denny can keep hinting at taking over, if I got guys in the upper echelons that can't tell serving maidens from big brown dogs. The point is, I guess, that this guy Stabo is trying to get them all to find some cheap bar or whorehouse. I kind of like this guy Stabo)

"I SHOULD THINK," said Lactymion, "that an adequate definition of sport, in the manner in which you wish to use the term—that is including all entertainments which free men enjoy—would be that set of occupations which men follow which cannot in their successful performance provide profit, either spiritually or monetarily."

"That is indeed a good beginning," said I. "But under so broad a roof, would you not be inclined to shelter many things that otherwise you would shun?"

"How so?" asked the son of Irion.

"By this I mean such ills and misfortunes which befall a man against his will, and gain him nothing but sorrow."

"For instance, disease and accident," said Polytarsus.

"Yes," I said.

"I, for one, agree completely with the fair Lactymion," said Stabo. "And, considering the matter closed, I plead that we take up again my earlier suggestion."

"Well, then," said Lactymion, frowning and studying his strongly shod feet as we walked along, "I shall have to amend my definition. Sport is therefore those activities which men follow of their own will, wholeheartedly, and from which they derive pleasure but no other gains."

"Ah, better," said the ill-mannered Stabo. "Much better, indeed, do you not agree, King Herodes?"

(One of the interesting things about this ms. and the objects that were found with it is that map of Earth. It was pretty accurate, considering that it was made five thousand years ago, where our ancestors idea of the universe was rather primitive, to say the least. The only discrepancy seems to be a gigantic island in the Pacific Ocean where there isn't anything today except Indonesia and water. There was a curious symbol drawn in the middle of this island. TECT says it's probably a mythical land, like Lemuria or something)

"AND WHAT OF those atheletes or thespians who display their talents at public gatherings, and who thereby receive great outpourings of gold and silver from the admiring throngs?" asked young Lydectes.

"Indeed," said I. "Would you consider that to be sport?"

"No," cried fair Lactymion.

"But there are those who perform with every bit as much skill and taste in other situations, and do not receive a single valius of gold in return. Do you consider what these men achieve to be sport?"

Lactymion thought for a moment before he replied. "Yes," he said at last, "in that situation I would."

"Then," I said, as we began the difficult ascent of the Gaetan hill, "your entire argument depends on the matter of remuneration. But, for the sake of the discussion, if the men in the latter circumstance, exercising their so-called sport for the purest of motives, happen by accident or fate to be rewarded, as by, perhaps, a wealthy and appreciative stranger chanc-

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ing upon them, would their activity cease to be sport at that point?"

"I realize that my definition was hasty," said Lactymion. "I beg that you demonstrate to me my error." Only one man laughed derisively at this point, and that was Stabo of Herra.

(It gets interesting here. I don't particularly care about these bickerings—I mean, do you think even fair Lactymion of the swift foot remembered any of it after he got home? Not if they had serving maidens bent over all around the place. Or even German shepherds—but we, even we, can sometimes pick up on something if we're paying attention.)

"LET US BEGIN simply, then," I said. The others in our party fell silent, allowing the discourse to proceed. "If, by discussing the moral values of sport, whether it be for pay or for the elevation of the soul alone, we permit ourselves to fall into the argumentative trap of defining good and bad, we shall learn nothing. Let us leave all that aside, except for a single point that I shall mention."

"That is an admirable suggestion," said Lydectes with a smile. "Many a time have my teachers begun to unravel that knot of good and evil, and never yet have they loosened the first strand."

"Just so," said I. "But will you not agree that to emulate the gods is a thing of virtue?"

"I will grant that," said deep-browed Lactymion.

"And I," said my friend Dimenes.

"If we're going on to the House of Sycon," said Stabo, "we must turn aside at this road."

"And have not every one of us seen the gods at their recreation, many times?" I asked.

"Full often," said Lydectes.

"Each morning, before their silver temples, upon the plain of Bry," said Lactymion.

"Until our visit by the gods," I said, "our learned men thought that they had an accurate picture of the condition of the universe, and of our creation as a race, and of the creation of our world and its sun, and of our entire system's place in the cosmos, is that not so?"

"Certainly," said my friend Dimenes, whose place in these dialogues is second to none.

"I do not understand what our scientists have to do with the question of sport, either as game or drama or whatever," said Baion of Memnaris, who had not spoken before.

"You shall presently see, I have no fear," said Lydectes.

"I thank you," I said to that youth, "but if that is the case, the honor for such a discovery shall be shared equally among all of us." At this point, Stabo of Herra left our group, and his part in the conversation is no more."

(I'll miss him)

"OUR SCIENTISTS once believed that men evolved from lower animals," said Lactymion.

"Yes," said Baion, "that is so. My tutor described that theory to me, before my parents banished him."

"It is all common knowledge," I said. "In our library, you may read of this hypothesis, which was known as evolution. Indeed, the theory had a lot of evidence in its support, and for quite some time all learned men in all nations accepted it without question."

"It is perhaps a mistake to accept

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any matter so completely," said Polytarsus.

"Ah," said Baion, "but that is the way with learned men." We all shared a pleasant laugh.

"Nevertheless, gentlemen, it was taught, and I am sure that as king of this blessed land I will not be held a miscreant for repeating what our forefathers believed to be true—"

"No, no," cried Dimenes.

"Then listen," I said. "Men were thought to have an ancestor that was not a man, some creature that was in many respects very manlike, but not fully entitled to the nobility of humanity."

"There is a certain attraction to a theory along those lines," said fair Lactymion. "It implies that this almost-man achieved his humanity by other means than mere accident of birth. As though his humanity were bestowed as a reward for conscientious effort."

"Not precisely," I said. "But, to continue. Before this postulated creature, there was a stupendously long line of animals leading down through ever simpler beasts, down through animals without backbones and animals that dwelt in the sea, animals that resembled the starfish that raid our oyster beds and animals we cannot even see with our unaided eyes. All creatures, then, were cousin to some primary, impossibly simple animal."

At this time we had reached the crest of the Gaetan hill, where our city's builders had made a small covered place for the benefit of travelers such as ourselves. Though this covered area is now in ruins, we stopped briefly to refresh ourselves and to admire the evening."

(You are no doubt aware that Denny is preparing even now to stab us both in the back. You know that you and I have always been friends. That's why I'm sending this to you. I know you have little academic interest in this kind of thing, but TECT's analysis and our own political uncertainty in regard to Denny makes this King Herodes' meanderings of more than casual interest. I hope you're taking notes.)

"IT IS A very beautiful night," said Dimenes, as he says almost every night.

"Let me ask a question, then," said I.

"Please," said Polytarsus. "And I hope you will continue your tale."

"I shall do both," I said. "A person who appreciates beauty, as our companion Dimenes appreciates the loveliness of this night, is partaking of that beauty in both an active way and a passive way. A person who thus relates to an activity or an object is in a unique position, and cannot be adequately described without reference to that activity or object. Now, as we beforehand put these activities and objects together under the term sport, how does this define the term art?"

"I should think that art is an extreme of that which we were calling sport," said Lydectes quickly. "It is an unfortunate extreme, and in our city is overused by those with pretentions to special sensitivity."

"Perhaps so," I said. "And the word entertainment? For surely, one may be entertained by a work of art or the exercise of sport."

Lydectes spoke again. "Entertainment is the opposite extreme, standing in precisely the same relation to sport as art, but in a negative sense. Art and entertainment are both corruptions of what we meant by the pure sense of sport."

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"Now we are getting closer to a definition," said fair Lactymion.

"If you will do me the favor of keeping that idea in mind," I said, "I will go forth with my history of the discomfort of our scientists."

"Yes, yes!" cried the company.

"Well, then, our scientists had the scheme charted farther back than there were living things to record. It was commonly believed that at one time our world was covered by a great and lifeless ocean, filled with chemicals and elements floated in prehistoric currents for many millions of years, forming combinations and breaking down again countless times, until, by accident, the very building blocks of life came into existence. By the mere fortunate contiguity of certain lengths of chemicals, the first crude living thing was spawned. And in their ignorant vanity, our scientists believed this."

"It is astounding to hear," said Lactymion.

We left the shadowed ruins on the top of the Gaetan hill and walked slowly toward my small villa. "I recall the day the gods arrived," I said.

"As do I," said Dimenes. "It is something I will carry to my grave, the sight of those fiery silver spears slowly burning toward us from the heavens."

"We all remember that day," I said. "Although you, Lydectes, and perhaps some of you others were very young. It was the day our scientists lost their superb confidence. Those of our people who were called into the gods' silver temples, they who became prophets and oracles, who seem mad to our eyes and our ears but are merely washed with the inconceivable aura of the gods, have given certain bits of knowledge to our scientists. The gods claim that they are not gods themselves, but rather merely another race of men. Although we worship them, as is their due, they claim that there are gods higher than even they."

"Yes," said Baion, "what you say is true, King Herodes, but it is something that I cannot understand, although I have tried ceaselessly."

"I must admit the same failure," said I. "Our scientists could well cling to the idea that we all arose from some primal bath of accidental chemicals, if we were the only race of men among the stars. But to think that the same incredible happenstance should occur twice, why, the odds against that are too great even to consider."

"And the gods of the silver temples claim that there are likely dozens, hundreds of other worlds like ours, all with men like us," said Lydectes.

"Could they have all risen from an unplanned accident, in the same way?" I asked.

"It does not seem likely," said Polytarsus.

"No," I said. "The more races of men that are discovered by the gods, the more they are caused to believe that something greater developed them all. The chances of coincidence diminish into near non-existence. So our scientists were at last convinced, by the evidence given by the prophets who had visited within the silver flame temples of our gods. And the carefully-wrought theories had to be abandoned."

"How does this aid our discussion of sport, then?" asked Lactymion.

"If there is a greater god above our gods, an ultimate god, then whatever this god does or desires or thinks must be right, as there is nothing superior to dispute it. Do you not agree?"

"Yes," said Lactymion, "I will grant you that."

"Then, with all the wisdom avail-

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able to their lesser minds, our gods emulate this greater god to the best of their ability. Is that not so?"

"Again, I cannot find fault with your statement."

"And further, we in our poor way emulate our gods."

"Yes," said Polytarsus, "although at our level our behavior must only little resemble the ways of that greater god."

"Of course," I said, "but that does not matter. Where we fall away from the emulation of our gods we enter into sin. Thus, there are those who seek to gain by their imitation of the gods from the sky. They believe there is money or fame to be had in this way, rather than the peace and contentment of the soul which ought to be their primary concern. In this way, such things as entertainment and art were created."

"I believe I see your point," said the brilliant Lydectes. "Then sport is the faithful emulation of the gods, in whatever form, for the purposes of worship and attuning of the spirit closer to that greatest god of which our gods speak."

"Yes," I said, as we reached the door of my small house. Dimenes opened the gate and invited the others in. We sat in the courtyard and continued our discussion, while the slaves went among my guests and attended to their various needs and wants. "It is for this reason that, along with the consistent but evidently false ideas of the scientists, we have abandoned the foot race, both the short and the long-distance, the vaulting with the pole, the hurling of the javelin, and other contests, in favor of the games of the gods: chiefly, the underhand throwing of the small white ball, the hitting with a stick of the ball having been thrown, the catching of the ball having been hit, the overhand throwing of the ball having been caught, meanwhile the hitter of the ball attempting to complete a circuit of stations whose significance has been lost in the extremities of time and space, and which our prophets cannot explain. In all these things the men participate with grim faces, and the women run about, laughing. In these ways we imitate our gods. In these ways we come closer to the greater god about whom our gods teach us. Thus, sport is a gateway to worship and wisdom."

"And now," said Lydectes gratefully, "we have well disposed of that topic."

"And I must bid you all a good night," said I, and I retired to my chamber.

(Well, that's all of it. According to the test samples, the civilization on Planet B was destroyed about twenty-five hundred years ago. This ms. and the curious map were made about five thousand years ago. TECT says, if you can accept this, that an advanced civilization from our "Lemuria" visited Planet B five millennia ago; Planet B at that time had a culture approximating the pre-Golden Age Greek society. Our Lemurian cousins so influenced the Planet B folk that the latter began the long dusty trail toward technical civilization, copying the style and manner of the Lemurians. That island culture on our own world then knocked itself out of existence and disappeared from our histories. In the meantime, Planet B developed interstellar travel and visited us twenty-five hundred years ago, influencing our pre-Golden Age Greeks (are you following this?). That's why King Herodes seems so much like Plato. Actually, Plato was copying him. *Now, this isn't so unlikely, except that TECT also says that there is*

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tangential evidence that the Lemurian culture of five thousand years ago was begun by another, even more ancient, visitation from Planet B seventy-five hundred *years ago. It gets better. This previous Planet B culture seems to have been instigated by an even earlier visit from an Earth civilization centralized in what TECT is pleased to call "Atlantis", which left Earth over ten thousand years ago. So our history and that of Planet B has been ping-ponging back and forth across the vast interstellar reaches at five thousand year intervals. We had a prehistoric culture that went out there, inspired the Planet B people, came back, and destroyed itself. They took twenty-five centuries to develop, came here, inspired a prehistoric culture, went home, and destroyed itself. And so on. TECT must have a lot of fun coming up with things like this.*

We haven't had the nerve to ask whose civilization came first. That's scheduled for next Thursday. But the interesting thing to note is that Planet B is now without any *people to inspire. They really wiped themselves out, this last time. That doesn't especially sadden me, other than to realize that if we bomb ourselves, or more precisely, if Denny bombs us all, back to the stone age, we can't expect any big brothers from Planet B to nudge us along this time. But how many generations are there in five thousand years? You see, it doesn't pay to get worked up over it all.*

Nevertheless, the timing seems to be about right. We ought to be blotting ourselves out soon, according to TECT. Either gentle taps at our chamber doors or loud, bright goings-on in the atmosphere. But that's Denny, right? Too bad, because I have to go to the john, and that would be a really terrible way to die. I mean, sitting there, reading Sports Illustrated, *with your pants down around your ankles. How much sympathy are you going to get like that? What could you say to God (either of them)? "Gee, God, I was just sitting there, minding my own business. . . ." It would never work. Well, we'll see. Catch you when the dust settles.*

P.S.: By the way, in case we have to start chipping axes out of rock, do you know what flint looks like? Just thought I'd ask.

Say hello to Cindy for me again, and write soon.

Yours despotically,
Tom)

—GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER

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This story was first published in the U.S.S.R. in 1964 and makes its first appearance in the English language in this translation . . .

SISYPHUS, SON OF AEOLUS

VSEVOLOD IVANOV

(translated by JOHN W. ANDREWS)

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

A SOLDIER would know them at once, O native hills!

By midday the sullen mountains showed gap-toothed, gray; while the deep gorges cutting them were yellow-red. Right off he also recognized the Skironian Way that could be seen about the steep southern slope. The Way was like to a shepherd's whip, coiled into a circle. So did the soldier Poliander view it in childhood; so had it remained even till now. The road was ill-famed. On it the wayfarer might suddenly glimpse blood run out or different omens of misfortune.

But what were misfortunes to Poliander? They had been measured to him in full measure, and he had drunk them from a full cup. He underwent untimely drooping and yellowing, as though from a blight.

He had taken oath to serve Alexander, King of Macedon, called the Great, and served. Later he served King Kassander, who united in himself, side by side, ruthless quick temper and still more ruthless ambition. King Kassander sequestered in a dungeon the wife and son of the Great immediately after the death of the latter, before whom had bowed the gods of the whole earth and the arms of the whole earth. Meanwhile Poliander continued to direct his silver-plated shield against the foes of Kassander. He, blockhead, had wished that Kassander should think well of him! They say faith shifts even a mountain from its place. King Kassander mistrusted the soldier Poliander, all soldiers: he feared his shield, his splendid, broad neck, his giant's voice, whose peal soldiers loved to heed. Poliander had not even reached forty when King Kassander declared him an invalid from the light infantry—too weak for hypaspist duty—and discharged him without pay to his native land.

And lo, before him the mountains beyond which are located his homeland—the rich city Corinth. The soldier stared at a mountain and thought: "Just how shall my native city greet me, and who's sound out of my relatives?"

Many a year had passed since the last time he'd viewed his Motherland. At that time, he'd been strong; although now his wounds were pronounced grave, dangerous, and he was discharged from King Kassander's

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army. Weak, weak!

"For whom are my wounds dangerous, I'm sworn by a dog and goose? Not for you, O King? Did it not frighten you, my sure expectation: the son of the Great, the now so wee and underaged Alexander Aigos—growing up—will be even so warlike as his sire? It's he shall need me! They march for *him*! And for you, O King, suffices the wit merely to maintain that gained by the Great. But will you indeed maintain that, O King Kassander?"

Thus did he mutter, cautiously gazing at the Skironian Way. It did not make him want to climb it. Sufficient for him will be soldierly misfortunes! The foretokens will suffice! He wants to live the quiet life of an honest man, for example, a colorer of woolen weaves.

And he recalled a trail, which once shortened travel to Corinth. True, the trail's hard, but for all that, without omens of misfortunes.

"Hi, you!"

Peasantry, wheat harvesters from a roadside village, looked on him with respect. To save himself from the heat, he'd taken off his armor; yet so broad was his chest, you'd think he hadn't done that with his armor. His arms sprawled wide—both from habitually wielding spear and shield and from the armor not allowing his arms to lie close to his sides. Besides, he did sleep continually on his back—large, sensual mouth wide-open. His eyes, as with many wanderers, were striking and of that greenish shade of mown grass that's right on the verge of turning into hay; yet it still preserves the color and scent of youth, while it enjoys a somewhat dry maturity.

He was standing in a pictorial and grandiose attitude that suited a war-

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rior of Alexander the Great, one who had marched with that king from the borders of Thrake to gelid Caspium Maeotis, where eternal winters already prevail; one who had viewed the mounts of Indian Caucasus, utter limits of the known earth, whence begins the Kingdom of Darkness; he had viewed both Memphis, Damask, Susa, and Ekbatana, capital of all Persia's rocky strongholds and more besides, and Hydaspes' shore, and the boggy banks of the Inuds, along which trudged, with tough yellow tusks, slit-eyed elephants opposing him from King Poros. He wished the peasants successful harvests, added that Zeus and Athene should aid them, and afterwards asked for water. A girl about fourteen, with pert eyes and thick, badly sheared russet tresses, carried over a jug of warm water. A breath of grain from the threshing-floor. A mule, blowing heavily, scratched its side. A female peasant with thick, well-fed thighs that demonstrated the nearness of rich Corinth—that knows how to buy and sell—stooped and again began adroitly and quickly to cut plump, glossy wheat-ears and heap them into baskets. The girl laid them—through a southerly notch—onto the tamped-down, violet-black threshing-ground. A light dust climbed from the threshing-floor: pack mules went towards it, and bullocks drew threshing carts with ponderous, solid wheels.

Upon returning the jug, Poliander said:

"Swear by dog and goose, the maids in Corinth are hospitable and beateous as formerly! And as formerly, artists feature them on vases, in bronze and on columns adorned with leaves of acanthus."

The villagers let themselves smile at his wise words, but the girl who'd brought water shoved a finger in her mouth from astonishment.

"I hasten to Corinth," said he. "I weary of glory and want a peaceful life! I have the genuine red juice of the purple shells, whose fishing I long examined—swear by dog and goose. I learned of the Phoinikeans to dye cloths in royal purple and worked under the best masters of Tyre, Kos, Zidon."

And he showed his sinewy fingers, whose long hairs were dyed blood-color. Startled, the peasantry shuddered, and an old man with a bulging, fat nose said to him:

"You were inquring about the Skironian Way? It is before you."

Then Poliander the soldier asked:

"Is the Skironian a road of happy outcomes?"

"More a road of happy outcome than any other sort."

"In my time," said the soldier reservedly, "strong and hurrying travelers shortened the travel. They swung off onto a trail called the Almi. Mules and oxen don't pass there, but my legs remember this trail well."

The peasants exchanged glances. The soldier read fright in their faces.

"Either rocks fell on the trail," asked the soldier, "or did a new abyss uncover itself? Or did the Gods start a waterfall?"

"A bad place," said the old one with bulging, fat nose.

"Robbers?" asked the smiling soldier and showed the peasants his short casting spear and the sword, straight and fine, with hilt adorned by silver studs and elephant's tusk. "Ha, ha! Many of 'em? Ha, ha!"

The old man, scratching himself with a crooked staff between the shoulders, repeated diffidently:

"A bad place. Go by the Skironian Way. Better. No man has tramped

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the Almi Trail many-many a year."

"Where then are more foretokens?" asked the soldier decisively. "Well, just whom am I to fear?"

"The son of Aeolus," answered the old man, glancing about timorously.

The soldier gave a laugh.

"The son of Aeolus? Son of the God of Winds? Who's he? A puff o' wind?"

"You'll see," said the old man, withdrawing. The other peasants had long since abandoned conversation on such a dangerous theme.

Poliander the soldier deliberately laughed aloud and raised his helm with a plume of split horse hair, roughened backplates and breastplates, joined on top by means of crumpled metal shoulder-straps. With a pang he glimpsed that moth-eaten felt lined this armor. "But I'd made up my mind it's profitable to sell my armament in Corinth. Have to buy a slice of Greek felt, to repair the armor. . . . It's not hard work, but the fact is, Greek felt isn't valued; while the splendid Persian felt's ruined! Does that mean the moth is a foretoken, too?"

Grumbling, he heaved up his sun-baked load onto his shoulders and took large steps; as if he'd try to approach the danger; he walked toward the Almi Trail.

He went shuffling the soles of his shoes, the skin of which was interlined with cork. His skillfully bundled-up armament sounded a remote murmur, which recalled campaigns and comrades that time had devoured, as a fathomless gulf devours seafarers.

Coming out beyond the village, he caught sight of a dried-up stream hidden by shurbbery.

Some goats, risen up on thin hind legs, were gobbling all the leaves. The river-bed was strewn with grayish-blue stones, and an evil lifelessness in the form of a thin, scarcely perceptible vapor climbed over them.

From the high sides of the stream was shedding sand, which created the sound of somebody who whittles soft wood. He became a little unwell. He stopped and gazed long at the goats, until he felt like eating.

Then he fetched a little cake from the carpet-bag, and nibbling it on his front teeth—like the goats—in order to prolong the satisfaction and consider his circumstances, he transferred his scan to the glittering, naked rocks where he was to climb. "And is it not for me to go by the Skironian Way?" he pondered. "It means, to return? But may a soldier really return, who's just been boasting how he'd scaled the high forts of Persia? Shame to a soldier of the Great!"

So he began to recall the Almi Trail, along which he'd climbed the first time thirty years ago—that and more. . . . He was sitting on his uncle's shoulders. Uncle was young, mighty. An oily breath from his long, thick hair, his moist chiton; and the child carefully keeping contact with the sloping shoulders. The uncle glanced at the child with feigned strictness and thrust toward him a slice of cake—from it the odor of smoke and olive oil. Not a single ill word was heard then about the Almi Trail, and less about the ruthless son of Aeolus.

"Why merciless? How's it ruthless? Who put this on: a punishing word that causes agony and forces obedience, like a strict dog-collar? Who—swear by dog and goose?!"

He stopped, placed his armament on a stone and impatiently glanced down.

He had walked often enough along

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the Almi Trail. He recognized it, regardless of the fact it was overgrown and its track took watchful stress to find out.

The village below had emerged into olive trees and vineyards. The vale was acquiring a color of uncouth, wilderness stone. His excessive, strong desire—to get away as high as possible—had come to pass. He was alone amid stones, indestructible, imperishable, eternal. And uncorrupted, eternal calm lay around him.

Yet not in him! In him a feeling hastily grew as before: a feeling that evil comes, as impossible to escape as to endure.

The soldier, like a horse that impatiently paws a valley, rejoicing in his strength before armed men, kicked against the ground. He knocked the stone where his weapons lay. The sword made a rattle. He bound the glittering sword to his waist, but put the remaining arms into the bag and fastened this firmly on his back.

Easier to walk. He strode and thought that impatience, as the wise rightly say, is akin to rashness. If only to have gone by the Skironian! He would have joined some sort of caravan and chatted to the merchants about the methods he'd used to dye the fine and nose-tickling clothes of Oriental lords. The merchants would have regarded him with emotion, would have rejoiced that they had such a guard and companion, and that evening would've treated him to a greasy and sizable slice of mutton. In night's gloom, by the flames of a campfire, he would feel just like in a daytime agora.

But here in daytime he does feel anxiety, as though night arched and hung above. He's recalling the dyes, and suddenly occurs to him: "Come now, you're really a dyer in the purple?" Approaching Corinth, he didn't begrudge a pinch of the treasured purple, three flakes of which he had spent his last money on. He diluted this pinch and dyed a wee slice of cloth, torn from the rectangular strap worn on his left shoulder. Hair on his hands got dyed gory-red; while the cloth unexpectedly changed into pumice-gray. What a mess, wasn't this recipe for coloring given by masters of Tyre? Had he paid them drachmas for nothing. . . ?

Then before him rose up the cellar where the purple was stewing in broad, shallow vats; while around the vats kept wheeling the merry dye-masters with sleek faces and dissipated eyes. Near the doors two slaves rocked in measured ups and downs, puddled fuller's earth with their feet, and the clay squelched between their toes. . . . Aw, Tyrean dye-stuffs made a fool of him! Fraud lay in this cellar: the same too that was at the court of King Kassander—and everywhere!

Lo, he is going to Corinth, to Corinth, gory and ruthless city of traders and seafarers, which lies so near—and so far! What awaits him in Corinth? That his hopes might not fade and that he might rather cope with the obscure fear: he quickened his steps. It seemed travel would bury all in oblivion, in the final outcome; and with joy he looked at a cliff in the form of a tree-stump looming over him, at the dull rock with violet foot. He dashed around it.

A hollow opened up, overgrown by oak trees. Deep down where the oaks ended, gravel deposits of a river began, and under this, amid stones, roared a green torrent, throwing up snatches of white foam. Ashes of a burning sun covered both oaks, and gravel beds, and stones by the green waters.

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The track vanished finally. The oaks had swallowed it.

He entered their shadow. The oaks stood crowded; the shade was heavy; nonetheless in it he felt bad as formerly. It seemed the bottom of a narrow and corrupt ravine. The lonely torrent roared pitilessly. Wide against the whole heaven, the oaks lay motionless, and their lower trunks were packed with short dead-wood twigs that caught at the soldier's cloak, sword, carpet-bag and water bottle.

Hastily, whispering prayers to gods, the soldier ran out of the oak grove and—stooped over because the bag was slipping from his shoulders, while there was neither time nor wish to right it—sprinted onto gravel, beyond which another cliff was seen.

He wasn't looking for a trail any more.

He sprang on rocks, broke loose, fell. Stones broke away and rushed down. He stamped into a foothold where stones had only just come to rest, but the foothold began to drift, and he desperately jumped out. He scratched his hands. Wounds covered his legs. The soles, the soles of these shoes that had crossed the Euphrates at Zeugma, the had stood the journey from the Euxine Sea to far borders of the Thebaid, tore off, and one he shed posthaste.

Acrid, vexing, sour sweat contracted his horizon. His power of observation vanished, and he saw ahead no father than ten spear-lengths. He was but moved by grace of the faculty usual for a warrior whom the Great had trained to go forward facing any circumstances and any forces; in that the virtue is the chief and all-uniting aim of human existence and the gods' pursuit.

The sun had sufficiently admired the submission of cliffs, alluvial deposits and oaks, and likewise the rare spiritual beauty and insistence of the soldier, and took away the ashen and evil heat that undermines the strength, as water does stone. The sun had let in soft, moist, violet-black shade. The soldier had a mouthful of water and took heart:

"Swear by dog and goose, I'll find this vanishing trail!"

Right behind the cliff he was just about to detour, he heard a sound, very unusual and strange for those mountains. He heard the whistling and droning emitted by a discus in its throw. The soldier knew this noise superbly.

They had taught him to throw the discus not only in sport, but also to create confidence in stoning enemies.

He leaned toward the cliff and lent an ear.

The sound grew, spread itself, and suddenly, as though forcing its way somewhere, hushed, vanished.

A tantalizing calm reigned over the cliffs. Again one had to divine something in the calm, corrosive as acid. . . . It did make the soldier want to holler, to shout in time with other soldiers, as they shouted in step while a team pulling a siege machine, or in battle.

Gathering firmness, he managed to round the cliff and saw another river deposit, just the kind he had passed many of. It did seem a wind came galloping. He recalled the old man's words about the son of Aeolus and gave a shudder. The thought thundered over his soul as though a trump sounded. He cowered onto the stones and breathed both long and hoarsely.

After that, he rounded another cliff and crossed another gravel bed. Toward the cliffs that bordered the deposits of river-gravel, he still approached with caution: he held his

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sword and appealed to his Gods and Aeolus too. He glanced carefully from behind the cliffs, and once, before so glancing, he had whetted his sword a little against a stone.

Unexpectedly the noise rose again. Only now it no longer resembled the noise of a hurled metal discus; but it could have been compared with the noise of sea waves that, after resting up in the depths of the waters, run and play with an offshore pebble. The noise was flying from somewhere above, though the sky was as cloudless as formerly. The noise swelled with such quickness and force that the soldier bounced from the cliff. The noise rushed and transpired behind the cliff, and from the cliff some stones bounded, even as the haft by which they fiercely brandish a knife rebounds.

Poliander was afraid. Yet he was a soldier, and his heart rose when he decided to glimpse his foe face to face. Reeling from fear, barely moving knees gone weak, he rounded the cliff.

The river-gravel gave out beyond the cliffs. There opened up a small hollow. From the mountains a merry spring retreated, hastily rearing and plunging back into this hollow. Oaks and fruit trees grew along its banks. A little further, the brook abruptly fell off towards a river, whose noise weakly penetrated the hollow.

Along the brook, in the shadow of oaks that formed here a lane, Poliander viewed a road of outlandish form, a kind he'd never seen. The road, punched through stone the color of wet cork, was a single rut, and, most probably, it resembled a trough or an endless channel that started somewhere high on a mountain and finished up at the edge of the dell below, in a boglet that was like to a huge horse's hoofprint.

Following this channel, his broad, muscular back flickering amid the shadows of the oaks sifting down, a broad-shouldered giant with pelts about his loins was rolling up a black boulder a good three men's height in size, polished to the sheen of a rounded sea pebble. His hanging belly, like to a wine barrel, now fetched onto the stone, now lost touch with it. His toes were digging into the stream-bed, and the dumbfounded Poliander saw them stomp themselves footholds here.

"Swear by dog and goose!" he exclaimed to himself, marvelling at the giant. "Many a miracle did I look upon, but this I meet the first time. Who might this mighty one be, who rolls a stone with the strength of a sea-tempest?"

Having heard Poliander's approach in the meantime, the giant turned a huge head with red beard and moustaches and forced out:

"Glory to the Gods, passer-by. G-g-glad! Go into the hut. G-g-l-lad! See to the fire. Fix beans, and mix wine. G-g-lad!" He spoke the word "glad" each time he stomped into a depression in the stones his toes pierced, and shoved the boulder forward in time to the word.

"Who are you, O Marvel?" asked Poliander the soldier.

And the giant made answer:

"I return at once." And he rumbled forth, "g-g-lad! Behind the hut a well. Descend. To the side—a pit. G-g-glad! In the pit—snow. Mix up with the wine. O g-g-glad!!"

And he once more looked over at Poliander. Now the soldier was able to scrutinize his face. It was wrinkled, old, but fulfilled with that successful overage of days which is most seldom met with; it chiefly demonstrates un-

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common strength and an able and patient expense of the strength.

Poliander jibbed, horselike, and made a move back toward the hut. The giant was shoving the stone, and the stone—as about a pivot—quickly rolled itself upward, ever dwindling away and ever increasing its sheen, so that it seemed: the giant bears toward heaven-blue a burning yellow ingot: the metal shot through with yellowish-red.

Poliander entered the hut, fanned oaken hearth-coals under a large cauldron, wherein beans had been getting all softened by the fire. He put firewood on the hearth, found a well beside the hut and went down it, carefully treading the cold and wet steps. Not having reached the water, he spied two niches. In the first stood earthen wine-jars; the second was crammed to the brim with tightly caked old snow. He tested the nearest jar with his shoulder. The jar heavily gave up the floor and rocked sideways. It came loose, babbling of its contents. An odor of wine.

"I swear by dog and goose, I won't get loose from him soon!" exclaimed Poliander, mulling the genial giant over.

He labored to bear the smallest wine-jar up to the hut, and after that returned to the snow, in which he found wild-goat meat wrapped in herbal grasses. He put the meat in the beans, and in the act of mixing wine, water, and snow, added spice—a precious handful of which he bore from the East.

He had just barely mixed the wine, when again close by resounded a horrible noise, a combined whistling and humming, as though a Titan had hurled a metal discus. Poliander leapt from the hut. Oak-boughs threw a wavering shade about the threshold. Far below the round stone whirred along its trough, jumping up and down. A fine, iridescent spray wavered above the trough—pathward along the stream. The stone ball finished running to its predestined end and got stuck in the quagmire, bespattered all round with grassy-green mud. The giant, squinting into the sun from under a great hand, waddled down the mountain. Having neared the hut, he wiped his hands against the goat pelts girded about his thighs and made a clumsy smile.

"Glad, traveller?" inquired his wheezy base. "I'm g-glad. . . ! G-glad. From where? Whither?"

In the hut it grew tense, and likewise Poliander's heart. He answered in a repressed voice.

"Swear by dog and goose, is this really not the path to Corinth?"

"To Corinth. . ?" inquired he with an effort. "G-glad! To Corinth."

The giant gave his guest water for washing. He watched the soldier wash his feet, after that his hands, and the great face, square as a table, covered by furrows of peasant care and labors, was filled full of thought. It seemed he was thinking: what is Corinth? And it struck the soldier's mind that it wouldn't be quite so easy to gain this giant's kindly understanding.

"To Corinth! go to my Motherland!" he exclaimed loudly, as to one deaf.

"To Corinth? G-glad! Sit. Eat."

They silently ate beans. After that, the host, with hands used to the trouble of flying sparks, fetched wild-goat meat from the cauldron and put it on the board. He heavily salted the meat, beckoned to the wine.

"Salt? G-glad. . ! We'll drink much." And he roared his laughter, hands held over belly. Evident it was that he picked his words with difficul-

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ty, and the words obtained were giving him great pleasure; he was drunk from them, as from strong wine.

They cleaned their hands on the rolled, soft insides of a loaf, and the host drew to himself the vessel of wine and snow-water. The scent of spice was extraordinarily pleasing to him, and this also indicated that he had not viewed men for a long time. The soldier greedily ate meat, his sound teeth reducing it to bones with crunches, and pride that the giant after long solitude had seen him, namely Poliander, pride strengthened his soldier's heart. He exclaimed:

"Glad, swear by dog and goose! We'll revel!"

And he raised his wooden wine-cup. Of a time he had guzzled wines—of Thasos, Lesbos, Naxos, and of far-famed Chios. He just knew what he was talking about in liquors. But this was best of all. And he expressed satisfaction to his host in flowery words.

"G-glad!" rumbled forth the latter. "G-glad. Drink. G-glad!"

So he gave him more wine from the jar.

He himself drank little; for him it was revelry enough that he looked upon a man. Now the soldier desired that he tell of what he'd gained, made, and squandered. He asked:

"Has no traveller truly passed here for a long time?"

"A long time," replied his host, smiling broadly. "Glad."

"But yourself—been here a long time?"

"A long time," replied the host. "Today—the last, last day, yes!"

"How is it the last?" asked the soldier. "Did you really sell your hut, garden, and wheatfield? Just where's your buyer? And did you sell dear?"

"Zeus, thanks to him, has freed me," said the host, shining dark-blue eyes of heavenly hue. "Glad! Last day."

"Glory to Zeus," said the soldier in an ordinary voice. "Yet did Zeus himself purchase your hut, and garden, and wheatfield?"

At that, the host, sawing the air heavily and striving for the man to follow, said clearly:

"Zeus has posted me here. Zeus did enfree."

"Well, priests?" said the solider, sipping wine. "They wanted to establish here a temple? A handsome place."

"Not priests! Zeus," repeated the host urgently. "Zeus has posted me here! Himself!"

"Zeus? Just who are you, if Zeus himself posted you here?" asked the soldier, somewhat mocking.

"I am Sisyphus, son of Aeolus."

The soldier froze in confused amaze, and wine spilled in a thick spurt onto his cold knees.

"Swear by dog and goose!" uttered the soldier, stammering. "You—Sisyphus!"

And since his host nodded his shaggy head yes, sipping wine from a cup, the soldier asked:

"I heard about Sisyphus, son of Aeolus, God of Winds. I do know that he ruled Corinth, and this long ago, yet far before the time of Homeros."

"It is I," replied the master with such grand simplicity, that the soldier quite overturned his cup and felt like the stout oaken beams on which the roof rested had been shaken before his eyes.

"Swear by dog and goose, it is you!"

"It is I, Sisyphus," replied he and again took a sip from his cup. "Drink!"

The soldier could not drink, and

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the lord had to start an explanation, however hard it might be for him.

"I sinned much. I murdered the guiltless. Kept looting. Zeus punished me. I was eternally to roll rock up a mountain. The frustum reaches the summit, and a force beyond ken makes downthrow anew. You have seen. So today you saw the last day. I obeyed. Yesterday Zeus appeared to me and said: 'Last day.' G-glad!"

And the master burst out laughing.

The soldier gave a start at a horrible thought and asked:

"Tell me, O honorable Sisyphus, son of Aeolus. You were punished, weren't you then, at the time you fell into the underground Kingdom of the Dead, the Kingdom of Hades. Does this really mean I also have turned up in it?"

Sisyphus made reply:

"An uncounted collection of days did I roll stone uphill in the underground Kingdom, Hades. Repeat—I obeyed and angered no Gods by a grumble. The pardon of Zeus is confined just to the fact I unwittingly crossed out of the underground Kingdom here, to the sun. Behold why I'm glad I see you, O traveler!"

"Tell me, O Sisyphus, son of Aeolus, how is this underground Kingdom, Hades itself? You can picture your thoughts briefly and strongly."

Sisyphus replied:

"Slush. Rain. Damp. For ever."

"Swear by dog and goose," exclaimed the soldier, "you couldn't stronger express it, your thankfulness to the Gods for sun and wine!"

"Drink," said Sisyphus, smiling. "G-glad!"

"Praise to wise Zeus," uttered the soldier, taking a full cup of muddy, red wine. "And were you a long time here on the mountain peak, alone?"

The master replied, "Long—I was rolling stone from dayspring to sunset. I obeyed."

"But after sunset you dug the garden, caught beasts, gathered fruits." The host nodded, and the soldier continued to enumerate the hardships of his life. "Heavy in the heat. But still heavier in rain, when winter approaches. Probably, the water hindered you."

"O whole floods!" cried his host. "Confront—the river! To the chest. Stone in the water. Hands keep slipping. Wet. Go against the torrent. . . . Yet I submit to the Gods. Lo, Zeus has pardoned me!"

"Praise to wise Zeus," said the soldier. "I beg you, pour more wine. Splendid wine. The last time I drank the like was in Media."

"You were captive?"

"I—captive? Of the scoundrelly and faint-hearted Persians?" said the soldier with disdain. "Well, do you really not know that Alexander the Great marched through Persia from start to finish?"

"I don't know. I was rolling stone. Who is Alexander?"

"O Gods!" exclaimed Poliander the soldier. "He does not know who Alexander, King of Macedonia, is! Means, you don't know about the battles won by him, about how he beat King Darius and razed the Indian Kingdom of Proros, and how he married the beautiful Queen Roxane, and how he collected a multitude of other treasures?"

"Nothing do I know," replied Sisyphus. "The stone was heavy and made it hard for me to keep looking around."

"Swear by dog and goose," cried the soldier, "I'll tell you everything from start to finish! Pour me wine."

The host filled his cup anew, and

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the soldier began to speak.

Night set in. Through oaken branches stars were showing. The branches were motionless; motionless too were the mountains behind; and hardly reaching into the hut was the babble of the brook. Sisyphus sat, great arms clasped about his knees, and the copper-red rays from the hearth lit up his face and eyes now become genuine blue.

The soldier was telling about the cities of the East. The cities were constructed out of brick that had been dried in the sun and solidly bound together with black, sticky tar—an original and natural product of the Babylonian soil. He spoke of oases, where tall palm trees grow and bestow just as many helpful things to use from trunk, branches, leaves, juice and nuts, as there are days in the year. He spoke of rafts floating on bladders of skin that carried the splendid gifts of the land—horses, spices, and women—along full-flowing rivers with high artificial dikes. Such indeed were Persia, Egypt, India. . . .

"But what became of them?" asked the host.

The soldier rose and lifted his wine-cup high.

"Praise to the Gods!" cried he. "We ferried across the Hellespont, made sacrifice to our ancestor Achilleus on the ruins, familiar to you for sure, of Ilion, and went toward the Hranicus River, where we did vanquish the Persians. And we marched about their land, set fire to towns, razed dikes, and chopped oases. The roads along which we passed were paved with whole groves of palms. We kept destroying and burning everything! And we reached the hot zone men can't get to."

So, incensed by tale and wine, Poliander continued fervently:

"In this vast wilderness we met only satyrs with purplish horns and gilded, cloven hooves. Their hair's rumpled, noses all flattened; on their cheeks welts, in that they constantly give themselves to wine, women and song. We killed 'em. We killed sirens, too. These ardent, consuming beings keep sitting in meadows, covered with flowers; while around them lie bones of men perished for love of them. We killed centaurs and pygmies, Inds and Aethiops. By my sword alone—see it, O Sisyphus—I wiped out a phalanx of pygmies, a cavalry of 'em. Every spring on goats and rams they ride in war array, for getting crane's eggs. . . . Ha, ha, ha. . . !"

"G-g-glad!" his host began to shout, lifting his cup. And the unseen and heavy mountains made him echo in a heavy voice.

"All this we ravaged and committed to the flames in the name of Achilleus and the glory of his scion: Alexander, King of Macedon! From this has Corinth grown rich, too. From this did King Kassander grow rich—who's ignobly dealt with me. . . ."

The soldier staggered from spite, drunkenness, and an unexpected thought that visited him. He took a glimpse of the giant, who sat still by the hearth, and said:

"Sisyphus, son of Aeolus! You're King of Corinth?"

"I have been King of Corinth," answered Sisyphus.

"And you will be King of Corinth again!" exclaimed the soldier. "And King of All Hellas. You will destroy mercenary, greedy King Kassander, weak for vile profit and ungrateful. And you'll reign!"

It made the soldier want to say that the underage son of the Great,

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Alexader Aigos, would ascend the throne. But how to say it? The eyes of Sisyphus gleamed; evidently he himself felt like gain, and no telling whether he would seat the underaged Alexander Aigos on his own shoulder. He, to finally subdue Sisyphus, cried:

"You will don the purple and take the throne! Do you know. . . . Do you know, O Sisyphus, I am sent to you by the Gods?"

"G-g-glad!"

"You're both to abandon this place and to leave with me, understand?"

"G-g-glad!"

"We'll loot, kill, rape, and collect treasures. . . !"

"G-g-glad. . !" roared the host. And yessing him, the mountains beyond the oaks roared, in the deep of the sea-ultramarine night.

The host was laughing loud and rocking delightedly. The fire now played on his most broad shoulders, now passed onto knees round as haystacks. The soldier shouted tall tales. There's nothing prettier when a town set ablaze burns. . . . But it's actually terrible in a town set ablaze. Persians and Inds shoot from behind each corner; treasures perish under the blaze; sparks that fly upward and smoke scorch the eyes; young women cast themselves into the fire; while for loot you get nothing but old men who're a bother to kill: against their withered sinews and bones your sword gets dulled. His fibs did not seem very convincing even to himself, and, gazing at the poppy-colored flame on the hearth, he recalled the royal purple he had promised to vest Sisyphus in.

Poliander said:

"Your goat fells in which you're arrayed, O Sisyphus, are a muddy-brown shade. Give them here. . . ."

"Why?" asked Sisyphus.

"Give me them, and immediately I shall turn them purple!"

He found another cauldron, filled it with water, quickly brought it to a boil and strewed there all his grains of purple. The water was aswirl with crimson blots. Poliander dipped in the long goat-hair, trying not to wet the hides, and after that stretched the fells about the hearth on sticks. He admired the red hair and dreamed on a bustling Corinth that feasted King Sisyphus, the death's head of Kassander at his foot and Poliander himself—commander-in-chief standing at Sisyphus' side.

"We go, O Sisyphus—going to glory!" he cried. "What's this miserable hollow to you? You don't manage to sleep in it, because nights you till the garden, weed, water, net fish, but also snare animals. Near a choir of beauties, you will sleep on down, sleep long, till midday.

"I'm g-g-glad. . . . to sleep. . . ." roared Sisyphus, blurting it firm and frank. "G-g-glad. . . ."

"You're King o' Corinth, and I'm your co-ruler. . . . " And with these words Poliander lay down on a couch and according to habit shoved breast- and backplates under his head, but covered his legs with his oval shield, so that the fastening hooks and clasps were sticking out. Alongside his body he put his short Argos sword, and after doing all this fell asleep immediately.

He woke up to the loud noise of battle. As ever, he was feeling in his insteps a cold, trembling fear that next siezed his ankles, too. Yet as did befit a soldier of the Great, he immediately fought down the fear and sprang up, sword at a slant.

It was early fresh morning. The noise of battle faded. The soldier made a step into a narrow band of

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light, squinted. The door opened.

And from the threshold of the hut, he spied rosy-fingered dawn climb over scarlet mountains, and at the foot of the dale, lit up by dawn-yellow rays of this sunrise, saw a huge, black basalt ball roll uphill along its own track.

Sisyphus did roll it.

Whereupon exclaimed Poliander in a voice trembling from hang-over and consternation:

"Swear by dog and goose, don't trust my own eyes! Can't be you, Sisyphus?! Wise Zeus really didn't pardon you? And really, didn't you give your consent to go along with me to Corinth and further, where fate'd lead us?"

Whereupon Sisyphus replied, shoving the stone with his shoulder:

"Old am I: hip, thigh 'n' joint. The younger generation of Hellas goes too fast. I might get behind, whereupon I'd pine somewhere East, in a hot, sandy waste. . . . While here. . . Here I'm used to. There are beans and snares for wild goats to be had, wine now and then and cheese beside. What more need I? I'm used to it. Go, traveller, to your Corinth; while I climb my own hill."

And heavily and stressfully striding, he rolled the stone.

And before he had vanished from the soldier's eyes, Sisyphus had growled to himself:

"G-g-glad to w-wind slow useless stones windwards, rather than to sow evil fast springing. . . ."

He was not used to such long phrases and therefore spoke inarticulately, and the soldier did not hear distinctly; but even if he had, then he'd hardly have followed.

Departing, Sisyphus' bulk and might were again changing to a broiled thinness; while his tone changed to molten metal luster. They both quickly approached the mountain-top, from which an invisible force must hurl the stone in return. The soldier did not feel like hearing anew the repulsive, whining and shaking flight of the stone. He caught up his gear hastily and fled onto a trail that had become clearly marked before him.

He strode along it and felt his heart cruelly torn. He foreboded that Corinth would not greet him as kindred, but as having gotten badly stale, on the alien side. Perhaps, better not to show up at all there! Well, but just where's his family seat, at that? He is an arrow that's been released, and there is no lucky wind which might deflect it. Who shall dye rags and tatters and old clothes in the purple?

And once more he took a glance at Sisyphus.

Sisyphus was high, at the sharp ridge-crest. The purple was making a play of color on the shoulders of the goat-fells that Poliander had yesterday dyed for him in folly. He had wasted the treasured purple, aw, the last. . . . In an inflamed voice Poliander did declare:

"Swear by dog and goose, O Sisyphus! Not without reason did Homeros name you self-interested, foul and cunning; O bloody son of Aeolus, you have made a fool o' me! Is it indeed possible this forebodes I shall always have been fooled. . . ?"

—VSEVOLOD IVANOV
(JOHN ANDREWS, TRANSLATOR)

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THE THING DOWN HALLWAY 9

BARRY N. MALZBERG

Barry Malzberg's stories for us have been as controversial as were David Bunch's stories here ten and fifteen years ago—controversial in that while some of our readers have defended each of these writers as brilliant and unique, others have expressed what amounts to loathing for their works; there has never been a middle-ground. Each has his own vision; Malzberg's is cynical, knowing, yet caring. His stories each illumine a facet of human insight, and that is no less true of the story which follows. However, if rumors which reach us are true, Malzberg has decided to quit our field. This story may be his last—for us and for the stf and fantasy field. If so, it carries an added poignancy . . .

At night, in the dormitory and close to dreams, Bobby felt that there was a connection between him and the thing that was more intimate than anything he had ever known and he was able to converse with it for hours almost as if it were there but in the mornings there was separation and he did not know if the night had lied to him or if it had given him something that he could not know during the day. The thing, which he had never seen, but which Bobby visualized as a mighty beast with seven paws and a crown of fire, was in the cubicle at the end of Hallway 9 and if he had wanted, during the day, he could have gone there, opened the cubicle and seen it plain but he did not and at night when he wanted the dormitory was shut against him and the forty others who slept there.

It was enough for him to know that the thing was there, in that cubicle, and that if things ever got too terrible he could release it upon command to make his life right again. Having that power, knowing that the thing was within his control and eager to assist, was enough for Bobby; knowing that he could at any time overthrow the Masters and end their rule of oppression and terror was sufficient. Sometimes not doing something was better than doing it because you could relish your power and the ignorance of those who thought they had the power over you. With the thing down hallway 9 Bobby could laugh silently at the Masters and their weakness, he could calculate the moment when he would unleash the thing to overthrow them, and that in itself was satisfying enough.

It had not always been this way of course. Two months ago, before the thing had come to the cubicle, Bobby had felt that his life in the dormitory was terrible and he did not know how he would be able to deal with the fact that for three more years, three and a half if extended by statute, the Masters would have complete control over his life, only to release him at seventeen to the next level under the Stewards who, he had understood, were

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even more evil and oppressive than the Masters. He had calculated his life in the dormitory, the possibility of somehow escaping, the possibility that he could take himself to the Masters with a plea of incapability and so win his release.

But neither would work. If Bobby had learned one thing during the years of his confinement, it was that escape from the dormitory was impossible because once the seal was put upon you you became *of* the Masters and they of you, the possession was the same as the possession of your own blood, and were he to somehow free himself from the dormitory he would only be found in the countryside within a very few hours, whimpering and incapacitated and taken back for punishment. They did something to the chemicals of your body which made it impossible for you to live if you strayed too far from the dormitory. And as far as the other thought, going to the Masters and pleading incapacity . . . well, it would not work. They had discussed it, he and the others of the dormitory, for years trying to find some kind of incapacity which would persuade the Masters that you would never be fit to join them but that you weren't unfit enough to be killed, but there was just no such argument. Either you met the requirements of confinement and would someday become one of them or you failed of their standards and, of course, had to be killed, because you were only half a human, half a Master and thus could not be permitted to exist. When he had come to realize, as he had as the sum of all his thinking and all of the talk in the dormitory with those who were just like him, Bobby had fallen into the greatest despair of his life. He did not know, there were whole weeks stumbling through the rituals of preparation and subservience when he did not know whether he could manage his life at all or whether—and this could only please the Masters, he understood—he would do something terrible to himself.

But that had all changed. The thing had come to the cubicle at the end of hallway 9, the thing which could destroy the Masters and open up the dormitories all over the world and change all of their lives and this happening had led Bobby to the first real peace that he had known in all of the years since his training had begun. The thing talked to him at night in the closed moments before sleep, during the day he could hear it murmuring to him during the rituals and sometimes, on his free periods, he would walk rapidly by the enclosure in which it said that it was hidden, feeling a secret power surging between the two of them. He did not, however, open the cubicle. That was the pact between him and the seven-pawed beast with crown of fire. It could not be seen until sent on its mission. Bobby alone could decide when that would be . . . but once that time came there could be no returning it to its secret space. So Bobby waited and prepared himself against the time and listened to the beast at night, murmuring to him.

It came from another planet, it said, a planet where the air was full of light and in the air shapes swung and danced in the waves of sounds they made; beneath the air, dense toward the surface of the planet hundreds of things just like the thing in hallway 9 worked their way slowly across, communicating with one another through impossibly complicated ganglia and processes of mental transfer. "We have watched your planet for many thousands and thousands of years," the thing said, "and have seen what it

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has become, with the Masters overrunning your world and making their power the only reason for the world and seizing the best of the children to be placed in their dormitories to become just like them after many years of oppression and pain. We think that this is a terrible thing that has happened and have discussed it in our councils, not only we beasts of the density but the beasts of the air and it was at last decided that one of our number would be selected as an emissary to your world where, through the use of his powers, he could beckon and bring about the holy, destroying flame that would drain the Masters of their power. But it was also decided that the one of us who would come would establish communication with one of your number and that it would be only at your request that we would bring the flame of sanction to your world because we do not impose our will upon other beings. We can help you but only if you decide that you want that help and until that time, after communication has been established, we can only express our powers and wait."

Bobby wanted to know, of course, why he had been chosen by the thing in the hallway to be in communication and the thing in the hallway had told him about chance and free will. "It could have been anyone," it said, "it just happened to be you. We may only be in communication with one of you throughout and so you will have to bear this alone, bear this responsibility alone, but you must also realize that it is your choice and not imposed upon you. Within your hands is the power to end the reign of the Masters but if you wish it to continue it may. We are at your pleasure; I will be here for as long as you want me to stay and you may make that decision whenever you want, be it now or five years from now, I will be waiting." And then, after talking to him like this for a little while, the voice in his head which was the voice of the beast would fade off, become thin and finally vanish because as the beast explained their great powers also demanded a great deal of rest; they could not talk continuously, they needed to sleep almost three-quarters of the day to avert further drain from the energies which the long trip across space had taken from them and to be fresh and rested for the time when they would bring the flames of power.

Bobby accepted what he heard in his mind. He had no reason to doubt anything the thing said; it could make speech and sometimes pictures of its home world in his head for one thing and that showed unusual powers there and for another thing it was made quite clear that Bobby did not have to delay his decision. The beast was quite ready to destroy the rule of the Masters any time he asked; it was equally willing to wait. The single condition of their communication was that Bobby tell no one or the beast would find someone else but Bobby had no trouble in keeping to that agreement because there was no one he wanted to tell. The others in the dormitory certainly would not have believed him; they might even have thought him crazy. Some of the worst of them might even open the cubicle at the end of hallway 9 which would merely bring about destruction beyond Bobby's decision. And one thing that you knew from the very beginning, even before you entered the dormitories, was that you told the Masters nothing at all. You listened, you observed, you did for them what they asked you to do and you conformed to their laws but you volunteered nothing because trying to im-

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press your opinions upon them was, in itself, a condition for banishment. Later on, as you moved toward Stewardship you were allowed a certain limited amount of self-expression but that would not be for a long time and there were conflicting reports about the amount of freedom granted to the Stewards as well. There were rumors that there was never any choice or room for individual expression until you became a Master yourself . . . by which time of course you were wholly a creature of the Masters and could be expected to act as they did.

The only free choice or room for expression then was with the beast and Bobby found that he began to take part in the conversations close to sleep; that rather than simply listening now he was talking to the beast, asking it questions, even seeking counsel on the choice. He did this subvocally, of course, talking deep in his throat with lips closed in bed at night and no one heard him. "But why are you willing to help us?" he asked once.

"Because we believe in freedom. Because even though conditions on our own world are not perfect, even so the things of the air and the things of the density believe in freedom, in the right of all intelligent living things to be what they will as long as they hurt no others. And there is no freedom on your world, not even for the Masters who have become their own creation."

"But why should that matter to you so much? Freedom. Is it that important?"

"It is that important to us. We are dedicated to its perpetuation in the universe. There are so many millions of worlds and only a very few where the conditions for freedom are even possible. That is why, when we see it being lost on a planet such as yours where it once existed we are particularly distressed."

"Then tell me why you do not bring about this freedom on your own?"

"The answer is simple," the great beast in his mind told him. "We believe in freedom and that means that we must accept its pain as well as its rewards. We cannot make the choice ourselves to destroy the Masters because that would be a violation of freedom too, an imposition of a new condition upon those who have had no part in the decision. So that is why we have established communication with you, why in every world all through our history it has been our way to establish communication with this one and have him for all make the decision. It is your choice not ours and only you may decide whether you want freedom. If you elect not to, if you elect to perpetuate the Masters then this too is a kind of freedom for it has been of your will that you have accepted slavery."

"Then I see," Bobby said, "then I think I do see," and said no more although the next night and the one after that he had to discuss it again just to make sure that the beast in his mind was not lying to him, that it was telling him a story which was utterly true and consistent. He had no reason to think that the thing was lying but living under the Masters, dealing with them, made you necessarily suspicious of anything you heard. The Masters lied all the time. They told you that you were reaching a goal of ascension and it turned out only that you had failed again. They told you that your friends had betrayed you to them everything about how you knew they hated the Masters. They would tell you that it was going to end very soon, that your training was being accelerated and would soon be complete

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and it would end up only as being another of their cruel tests at the end of which they would laugh at you. So even though he knew that the thing was being sincere and all that he was being told was completely true he found it wise to question it over and again. Of course he said nothing to those in the dormitories. They would not have believed him and if they had they would have turned him over to the Masters and the cubicle door would have been torn open by them and . . . Bobby wanted the choice to be his.

And so, finally, when the beast had been in the cubicle and in his mind for a long time, maybe three months, maybe six (you lost control of all time in the dormitory) he said to it, "What will happen if the Masters are destroyed?"

"Chaos of course. The collapse of your society as you know it because it is so dependent at this time on the control of the Masters."

"Will many die?"

"All of the Masters and many of the Servants."

"How many of the Servants?"

"It is impossible to tell. It depends upon how quickly your world is able to adjust to the loss of the Masters. It could be only a relatively small number, it could be a great percentage. Once the system under which you live has been destroyed it is impossible to say."

"How has it been on other worlds?"

"On some there has been great devastation and others have made the conversion to freedom with only a little disruption. Most of them sustain great losses, however and much pain during the transition. I would not lie to you about this."

"But all of the Masters will die?"

"All of them. They will be no more nor will their great machines which torment but which also feed you. It must be your decision. No one can tell you what to do. The price of freedom is very high and on many worlds it has been fatal. Even on our world freedom is not always pleasant and the things of the air and the density are suspicious of one another. But we have survived in our two forms and it is likely that you will survive too."

"Will *I* survive?"

"Oh," the thing said, "oh, you mean personal survival. I cannot answer that. In the devastation which ensues you may or you may not. It is impossible to say. The price of freedom cannot be paid in assurances. Freedom can destroy individuals while making a society whole."

"I see," Bobby said, "I see," and he said no more, the thing burrowing to its sleep deep within him. He said no more and he woke up in the morning the dormitory quiet around him, the huddled shapes of his friends rigid in the darkness and then, when the first Master slipped the locks he came to the realization that he knew what he must do. He would have to do it now before conviction left him. He came from his bed and put on his uniform and went quickly down the hall, crouching under the light-checks of the Masters and came to the cubicle.

"Now," he said as he stood there, "now, it is unbearable, I will end this, I will do it now," and reached forward to touch the knob, the knob cold and slick in his hand but as he started to pull it toward him another thought struck, a thought which grabbed him like a hand and stopped him and so he stood there poised for a very long time, still, stricken by light while behind the door he could hear the little clawing sounds of the thing within, waiting now, aroused now, eager at last to do his bidding.

—BARRY N. MALZBERG

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The Course of my Career from and Including THE PURVESS INCIDENT or

HOW I BECAME AN AMBASSADOR OF THE REALM, *Due to Certain Happenstances of Said* INCIDENT; *wherein is discussed diplomacy within and outside of the boudoir, the evil of onerous odours, the partial success of inventors, and the performance to and of certain ends. an account from the memoirs of*

SIR EDMUND CLARENCE CLEVERE

prefaced and annotated by James Lincoln Warren

This is the surviving fragment of a larger work by the Age of Reason English diplomat and explorer, Sir Edmund Clarence Clevere (1687-1758). Clevere was known to many principal figures of his era, including such worthies as G. F. Handel, Jonathon Swift, Alexander Pope, Dr. Samuel Johnson, and the brilliant artist Hogarth. More interesting than his acquaintance with the literary and artistic giants of the epoch, however, is his much deeper sympathy and friendship for many little known scientists and crackpots of peculiar brilliance, and in this light I have deemed it proper to seek the fragment's publication, primarily out of historical scientific interest, but also in recognition of a personality that may well rank with two other great chroniclers of their respective eras, Samuel Pepys and Gen. Harry Flashman.

—James Lincoln Warren,
New York, 1974

MY FIRST REACTION to the knowledge that it is my destiny to procure this tale for posterity is one of humility, yes, and even hope of the reconciliation of my own reputation and the Reader's sensibilities. For I know not who may discover my account, but to whomever Fate decrees to peruse this document, I beg of you not to hold the indelicacies of my narrative against me, for I would not wish to appear as a champion of unpalatable

Illustrated by MARCUS BOAS

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ribaldry or immodest Outrage: such is not my purpose, and what details I include I must to preserve the Truth, the pursuit of which is my heart's dearest endeavor. Having thus made my apologia, I am now prepared to undertake the recitative of my curious story, a tale which begins with an Incident I cannot to this day reflect upon without a slight shudder or the merest echo of the Horror it induced in me.

My name is Sir Edmund Clarence Clevere, and at the time of this writing, as I have done since the summation of my many studies at Oxford, I dwell in London, and it is in that great City that my participation in the related incident began, in the crisp autumn of the year 1711. At that time my business was not so much Diplomacy as Intelligence in conjuction with Her Majesty's Army[1], and I had just returned from a profitable, tho' hazardous foray into Russia. I was delighted to come home at last to a civilised Empire, and you can imagine my dismay at discovering upon my arrival seal'd orders from a General, a Peer whose name I shall not disclose, in respect for his prestige and his family. I received the letter from my man Montague, and with my heart sliding to my knees I broke the seal and slowly read the letter's contents.

October 11, 1711

To the distinguished Sir Edmund,

In respect to your many talents, and in especial your ability to extract information from the most stubborn sources, i.e. rocks and trees &c., I am entrusting to your care an American whom we suspect of some connection with French Spies in the Crown colonies established there. In God's name and in the name of our Sovereign Queen, I charge you to discover

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whatever dangerous knowledge he may have imparted to our lustful enemies.

Yours,

Gen. A——A——, Lord A——.

My HEART gladly returned to my chest, because it appeared that I could enjoy this assignment within the comforts of my own home, and I recall that I may have clicked my heels once or twice in my intense jubilation. Of course, I did not suspect that this joyful notion was to be far removed from the repugnant reality. Far from any suspicion of the impending horrors, I felt only glee at the prospect of having an easy time with my cushy assignment.

When the scowling soldiers brought the American (and I would have scowled the more fiercely had I been one o' them), I nearly gagged. He was crudely garbed in a well-worn but ill-fitting suit of smelly deerskin, and upon his low, idiotic forehead was perched some amazing excuse for a hat, apparently made from the hide of some furry indigenous American creature[2]. His appearance was unsettling to a gentleman's composure, certainly, but how can I describe the olfactory agony I was forced to endure? He could not have bathed in at least a year, and his body's stench was overwhelming. Thus was I introduced to the fumes and the gargoyle countenance of Methuselah Purvess.

'By the Feet of Christ!' I exclaimed. 'You bring unbidden into my parlour the strong aura of a stable, or a Barn.'

'Well,' he said, his yellow eyes glaring into mine, 'at least I'm clean.' And with this audacity accomplished, he began, in an unspeakable awful manner, to pick his nose with his gnarled forefinger, his face contorted with a singular concentration, as if the effort required to perform this distasteful deed was Herculean in the extreme.

'In my house there will be no exploratory diversions into one's nasal passages,' I said with a becoming dignity, 'and before we can discuss our affairs, you simply must bathe yourself.' Did I see a fleeting expression of fear on Purvess' ugly face? If so, it was enveloped by scarlet irritation.

'There ain't nowhere ta bathe,' he exploded, looking slightly angered, and the air turned momentarily dark with his fetid breath.

'You can try the bathtub,' I intoned, and instructed my gentleman's gentleman to show our guest (for lack of a more suitable term) to the bath. No sooner had the vile Purvess left when I became aware of a horrendous commotion above. But in my bitterness for the man and his barbaric habits, I am forgetting my major purpose: I do not intend to bore my Reader with an account of my maid's pinched peachy arse. Therefore, I shall move the scene forward, as in the theatre, for the gross result of days of intense interrogation was that I had discovered no more about the man save his unquenchable crudity—nothing, that it, until he bolted.

How, you most certainly will ask, did such a barbarian elude the protective agency of a capable gentleman in Her Majesty's service? By means most bizarre, I may comfortably assure you.

After we had swept away the eroding influence of his fantastic filth, Methuselah Purvess had begun to withdraw to the comforts of the bottle, or what was worse, more specifically to *my* bottles, and not a decanter in my house was secure from his vandalism. How can I emphasize my dis-

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pleasure when I discovered I had lost my finest Irish Brandy and Scots whiskey? And the demon did not observe the virtues of moderation.

Picture if you will us both, myself in a state of exhausted exhiliration and the American in a state of infatuated inundation. I constantly made subtle references to his suspected dealings with the French, and yet he spoke of naught but an ancient native medicine man whom he had befriended, and that is the entirety of all I shall ever know about his past. I did not then realise, of course, that his short term future was to unfold with the abruptness of a pistol crack. At one point he was speaking calmly of his savage companion, and then quite suddenly he leapt from his chair and began screaming and whooping like an Arab. I was shocked absolutely senseless. As we were (or rather had been) reposing in the salon on the first stage[3], he had easy access to the balcony, and running out there he vociferously exclaimed, 'follow me if you can, you womanish bastard,' and was then gone, having ostensibly launched himself into the tree which grew in front of my little manor.

'Montague!' I cried to my butler, 'outside! Stop the bloody scoundrel!' My servant faithfully rushed downstairs, and I hurried to the french windows from which Methuselah Purvess had disappeared, to make good his final challenge. May he fry in Hell longer than Lucifer himself! I dove with the grace of a swan, but still my best wig was hopelessly ruined, and my fine satin breeches were grasped by the unkind branches of the oak, which sundered the seams apart with a mighty rip, leaving me suspended in the hated foliage with my arse bared as on the day of my birth.

My maid meanwhile had come to the window, doubtless to investigate the unruly activity, and screamed, with all the attractive pitch of a goose, in sight of the pale white apparition facing her from the support of the tree. What ignominy! Yet worse than my profound embarrassment was the grueling knowledge that the wretch had escaped.

Immediately the machinations of my mind were set in motion . . . where does one seek an inferred ally of the French? The answer sprung fully armed from my forehead, and immediately formed on my lips. Despite my reputation as a man of the world I decided to pay a visit to a friend who was unquestionably an authority in the matter which so assertively suggested itself.

After having redressed my disgraced rump, I hurried posthaste to the study of a scientist and physician, one of my dearest friends, a man entitled Dr. Allen Caspar Finch, F.L.B.S.[4]

'By the Breath of Jesus!" I cried as I burst into his laboratory, 'Finch, I am in dire need of aid. Can you tell me where a fugitive, a crude American, may find . . . accomodations?'

'In a bordello, you mean,' he said with a small smile. 'I may know of such a place.'

'Excellent! You must tell me its location immediately. It is a matter of—' I paused, as I've seen actors do for effect, '—a matter of the Realm.'

Dr. Finch merely laughed. 'I think I can be more help to you than merely supplying the address of a bawdy house,' he said. 'Come and behold my latest investion: The man-seeking detective device.' He arched his index finger in summons and bade me follow. At the rear of his fabulous workshop was poised a most perplex-

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ing device which had the appearance of a devining rod of a most advanced nature. From a large wooden fork hung a variety of glass jars, each containing a differently coloured chemical or extract; I seem to remember at least five small vials of this peculiar nature suspended from the instrument. The tops of these bottles were corked, but from the cork Finch had rigged some sort of ingenious tubing so that the contents of all five jars were by means of the tube enjoined.

'Isn't it lovely?' he said, with a grin of parental pride upon his distinguished features, his eyes agleam behind his spectacles.

'O yes,' I replied hastily. 'What does it do?'

'Ah. How does it work, eh?' He emitted one of his learned chuckles (to this day, I have not quite figured out how Finch can make a chuckle sound educated. But he does). 'It's all very simple. You are, of course, acquainted with the method whereby the devining rod operates?'

Of course I am no fool. I know Newton's Laws as well the next educated man[5]. But when Finch began talking about relative mass attraction, &c., he completely lost me. Apparently, he has constructed a strange theory that the devining rod works according to a shift of Gravity due to the different weight or some such qualification in the presence of subterranean liquid. You see, it's all very nonsensical, but apparently it's correct. I know for an unfortunate fact that Finch's devining rod worked.

'The principles involved with my man-seeking detective device are rudimentally the same,' he said. 'Each of these vials can be adjusted to fit the specific qualities of an individual—making it a certainty that the device will locate that individual.'

'Ah!' I said, not comprehending in the least. 'But how can we be sure that it is adjusted correctly to the scoundrel I am seeking?'

'Simply accomplished,' he said with a knowledgeable smile, 'by the acquirement of a sample of said scoundrel's body chemistry.'

'And what form should such a sample take?' I asked, a little put out. I knew very well that I could not draw Methuselah Purvess' blood, despite the joy I would extract from such a procedure, the simple cause being that he had to be found first, in which case we would have to turn him loose again in order for Finch's invention to be of any use.

'Yes, well,' he said, coughing. 'Ah, indeed, ah, the customary form would be, ah, a generous sample of feces.'

'What? Ordure?'

'Well, yes. If this man is an escaped prisoner of yours, as your eagerness indicates, then surely you must have access to such a sample.'

And so we were thrust into the discouraging task of preparing Finch's devining rod with a hefty chip of American turd. Having thus armed ourselves, we set our feet in stride swiftly toward the accomplishment of our quest, tho' it would take us accross the threshold of a great den of iniquity; which is to say we went immediately to a most disreputable brothel, one with many offeratories which (Finch assured me) were undeniably bizarre.

The Madame met Finch with open arms and an open heart. ' 'Ow yew maikin' out, Doctor Finch?' she squawked. 'Yew know yer a big faiv'rite 'round 'ere. Ooh! And 'o's this yew come draggin' alond wiv yew? I'll fetch Betty an' Alice meself, for nuffin's too fine fer Doctor Finch an' 'is pal.'

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Finch turned magenta red and became most apologetic, and had begun to explain chivalrously that he wasn't here for pleasure, but rather on business, when the devining rod began to shake violently.

'God's teeth!' I roared. 'The villain is still here!' Without further ado Finch and I rushed headlong through a throng of delicate creatures, following the wild stick's vibrations, knocking a few of the more unfortunate madonnas of the night upon their cushioned professional buttocks. And believe me, for I am quite a gentleman, I have never felt a greater urge than the one which compelled me to reach out and squeeze one of those score of alabaster breasts. Luckily, virtue and duty followed the same path, as Finch and I ran precipitately into a bedchambre, whose female occupant shrieked at our mercurian entrance. I don't imagine I shall forever forget the look of abject consternation on the pudgy face of the rotund Gen. A——— A———, Lord A——— as Finch and I leapt upon his rented bed and ran accross to the door at the room's antipodal wall, the entire action as swiftly executed as the dive of a falcon.

'Excuse me, m'lord,' I cried as we flew above him and his shrieking whore and out of his room.

Suddenly we burst into the adjacent room, and who should be present but the wicked Purvess himself, just dropping his trousers in the presence of a deliciously attractive harlot.

'Aw, damn!' he yelled as he wheeled to face our charge. 'Ya just cain't leave a feller alone, can ya? I told ya 'bout that Injun medicine man I was buddy to. Well damn if the ol' red nigger didn't teach me to take care of myself, too!' With this speech he lifted his hands and began to chant something in a very strange tongue. And a strange sight it was, too.

By this time I was quite wrathful, and scarcely in the mood to listen to the ravings of a lunatic, so I grabbed him just as he reached the climax of his chant, and what happened then was extraordinary. There was a collosally loud report, like cannon fire, followed by the presence of a stench that made the American's foul odour of no account. I could see Finch swaying in a daze, and it was obvious that the bottles of his apparatus had exploded, the same having sent out their contents in a fine, malodourous spray throughout the entire room. Methuselah Purvess cursed and crapulously belched, muttering in a sepulchral tone something akin to 'Someday that Injun's spell is gonna work right.' It caused me to suddenly shudder, that statement, as the thought of what Purvess may have intended with his magic struck me.

Finch has told me since that Purvess' utterances could have had nothing to do with the destruction of his device, and that it was in fact caused by the combustible nature of the sum of the chemicals he had utilised in realising the invention, a fault which forced him to abandon the project altogether. The worst of it all is that Purvess proved that he was not in league with the French at all and was returned to America, where I hope he rots, although doubtless Finch would say that the saddest part of the disgusting adventure is that they will no longer tolerate him at one of his favorite houses of pleasure.

The greatest (and truly only) benefit of the entire affair came in the guise of a summons from Lord A———, who looked me in the face and said, 'You're aware, of course, that we need a new man in

(cont. on page 130)

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His was the gift of flight–but of what purpose was that, now?

THE FLYER

COLIN SAXTON

Illustrated by COLIN SAXTON

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THE RED GRANITE CLIFF rose in a series of cragged and splintered walls for over two thousand feet. Black and yellow lichens scabbed its face. One towering pinnacle jutted upward half as high again, its enormous mass tilted to the south, threatening to crash into the maze of gullies and crevices that lay at its feet.

Out of the southwest a strong wind blew without cease. For millennia the wind had pushed at the tower, calling up wild tempests to hurl at its impassive face. Out of these storms had come lightnings, burning and scorching the rock, splitting off jagged fragments, opening up narrow fissures, but never quite penetrating to the vast caches of supplies.

Despite this elemental and never ending attack the narrow south face of the rock tower remained basically smooth and flat: a vast overhanging cliff a thousand feet high. In contrast the northern side was a broken and nearly vertical slope of tumbled blocks. Chaotic areas of angular boulders were interspersed with dizzying falls of sheer smooth rock.

From the base of the tower the great cliff continued downwards to a green valley, its numerous streams looking like fine veins of silver in a slab of emerald. Low turf-covered hills surrounded the valley and fell away on their outer sides to a great plain of earth, dotted here and there with patches of tough moorland grass.

The small streams, coming from some unknown source behind the great cliff, poured into the valley as a series of waterfalls. After wandering through fields of grass and clover, they plunged underground at the eastern end, and emerged at the outer base of the hills as a broad river that wound out over the plain like a great flat worm, until it was lost in the haze of distance.

The valley was a perfect ecological system. Protected by the rampart of granite from the ceaseless wind, only the most violent storms affected its existence. Although the weather could get quite hot, seasonal changes produced no very great extremes, and disease was unknown.

The thousand or so inhabitants lived off the land. Carefully cultivated fields of cereals, leaf vegetables and root crops were supplemented by a variety of fruit trees. Herds of cows, goats and sheep roamed the lush pastures and low hills. Terraces of vineyards occupied south-facing slopes, and woods of fir, larch and beech grew in the shallow valleys. Many birds, some with bright plumage, sang in the trees.

Against a cloudless blue sky the deep red of the rock tower glowed with a burning intensity. The heat of the day was moderated by a gentle breeze carrying with it the scent of wild flowers.

As the sun approached zenith a few people gathered in the central plaza of the village. Singly and in small groups they occasionally looked towards the cliff. At noon they all shaded their eyes and stared fixedly at the very pinnacle of the rock tower.

On the brink of the appalling overhang a pinpoint of bright light flashed . . .

The Flyer curled his talons over the edge of the rock and leaned outwards into space, his wings held behind him, partially spread. For long moments he poised there, absolutely motionless, sensing the exquisite balance of forces: the exact opposition of the push of the wind against the forward momentum of his body. A thousand feet below him the cliff extended to east and west until it was lost to sight.

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He looked out over the dark plain towards the south. The horizon was a perfectly flat hazy band extending in a great semi-circle that terminated at the periphery of his vision. In his mind's eye he saw the complementary image of the northern horizon, another semi-circle, bounding the dry grey earth. This was his world; no matter how high he flew he was circumscribed by a vast circle, bisected by the line of granite cliffs. At its center the tower of rock and green valley.

As he moved his head, scanning the distance, sunlight flashed on the gold of his visor, and ran in a stream of dazzling silver along the leading edges of his spreading wings.

He leaned far out, and with a slight push, wings still only half spread, plunged towards the sun blackened stones of the southern plain. Spreading his wings wide he caught the warm rising air and with the complete ease and assurance of consummate skill, soared in ever widening circles till valley, cliff, and rock tower were left far beneath, and he alone was the center of the great circle.

There, where the wild high winds created oceans of energy, he wheeled and banked in the surging tides. Swooping and climbing on the rushing currents he was borne higher and higher on fountains and spouts of warmer air.

He flew south, stooping and gliding out of the higher air, soaring and diving again. As he circled and looked north the tower of rock was no more than a tiny finger in the distance. The valley was lost to sight behind the sheltering cliff.

Columns of hot air from the great scorched pebbles of the desolate region below carried him to new heights. Slowly circling he continued to climb, until all the skill and instincts born of long training could not compensate for the decrease of wind pressure. The thinning atmosphere curbed the vital currents and offered no support.

He sank lower until he could rest in a web of streaming energies. Delicately, with sublte finger movements, and gentle flexions of his forearm muscles he spilled air between the long blade-feathers of his wing tips. Contractions and relaxations of his lower back and buttocks spread and rippled the thin flat vanes of his tail.

Occasionally to compensate for a fall in pressure he would tense and contract his large upper back and shoulder muscles, flex his biceps and beat at the air with his wings, all the blade-feathers spread wide. He marvelled yet again at the unimaginable skill that had created this covering of metal and plastic in which he rode the wind. The infinite subtleties of its articulation, and the mystery of the energy that amplified his own inadequate muscle power sufficient to control the great wings. "A toy of the princes of the First Age, developed from the skills of medicine." So his father had told him. This was part of the teaching handed down through the family of flyers from generation to generation. He recalled the simple catechism.

From Horizon to Horizon
We watch for its coming
On wings of bright silver
With head of fine gold
A marvel of prosthetics
Our sky-robe of Princes
Made in the First Age
Before the great fires.
Riding the high winds
We are the Flyers
We shall continue
When all else expires.

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No one doubted the necessity of the flyers, but no one could explain their function; other than to watch. But no one knew for what they looked. The reason for the eternal vigil was unknown, even to the flyers themselves. Speculation, although inevitable, was never undertaken seriously. The tradition continued, unquestioned, an essential ritual that formed a vital mythic axis around which the metaphysical beliefs of the community were constellated.

The present flyer was unique. He was alone. Always previously there had been two flyers. Man and woman. Never before in remembered time had there been only one.

But he had not always been alone. Until two years ago he had soared in the oceans of air with his mate. Together they had ridden the wild high tides. And many times for sheer joy they had clasped talons and spiralled down, faster and faster towards the rocks below. Turning over and over in a reckless dance, only at the very last moment had they spread their wings and, catching the rising currents, climbed higher than ever, to plunge yet again in ecstatic union.

There were also the times in the eyrie, when passions born on the winds were consummated in sexual pleasures more intense and magical than the wildest flights.

Then came the day when hovering high together, the world remote below them, he had seen her plunge suddenly downward, one wing streaming behind, the other making grotesque movements in the buffetting winds.

Cold with apprehension, he folded his wings and dropped like a stone. It seemed impossible that he could reach her before they both crashed into the black stones of the south plain. Then he saw the stricken, fluttering form hit by fierce air currents which carried her towards the edge of the great cliff. With two thousand more feet to go there was hope. Slight wing movements deflected his fall beyond the cliff edge. Five hundred feet below the summit he struck with his talons at her one flapping wing and gripped firmly near the body. Straining every muscle he spread wide his wings and opened every blade-feather to its fullest extent.

The shock of his arrested descent nearly tore her from his grasp. The metal of his suit screamed its protest, but he clung on, and desperately tried to beat his way upwards. Wild with fear he forced his aching muscles beyond their normal capacity.

But they still fell towards the valley. His other claw, searching for a grip, tore away the visor of her helmet and he looked straight into her face.

She was staring directly into his eyes, her own dark eyes wide and intense with an expression in them he could not read. Thick strands of black hair whipped about her face. Suddenly she screamed at him with a violence he could not believe, "For God's sake let me go." Stunned, he relaxed his efforts and they plummetted downward faster and faster. Her eyes were wild, her teeth bared. With terrifying venom she screamed again: "I hate you."

It was her final gift. Without being aware of his actions, blind now to the appalling reality of the situation, he let her go.

Folding her one good wing she crashed to the valley floor: a stain of bright silver against the vivid green.

Unconscious now, his muscles responding to subliminal instincts, he

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climbed through dangerous turbulent currents to the eyrie on the rock tower.

Conscious, he could not have done it, it would not have been within his powers to will his already aching back and shoulders to such superhuman efforts. In retrospect he could never understand how or why he had tapped these unknown reserves of strength. Perhaps it was because he inherited the conviction of generations of flyers: that there must always be a flyer.

On many of the lonely days to come he would catch himself repeating this thought, a dull mechanical mantra ceaselessly turning in the hollow centre of his brain. In a dimly realised way it helped him come to terms with, and even in part recognise what lay behind her violent shriek of hate. But his tragedy was that he never fully awoke to the fact that it was an ultimate act of love: to him, to the community they served, to the generations of flyers, to life itself.

In a deeply organic way, beyond thought, she had known that they would both be killed if he clung on, and that he must be shocked into releasing her. She had poured every energy of love and instinct into acting out with compelling power the one profound lie of her life.

Three days later the climbing party (volunteers who had risked their lives to investigate his absence) found him lying spreadeagled on the floor of the eyrie. His eyes were open, staring at the roof of the cave. Thin trickles of blood from his nose and mouth had dried dark brown against his grey skin. The index finger of his right hand was extended and close to it were curious circular symbols scrawled in the fine pink sand that covered the floor.

At the base of the steps leading to the top of the rock tower, the miraculous flying suit lay in a heap, its delicate vanes splayed and twisted.

For twelve days the climbers stayed with him caring for his needs. They bathed his torn muscles with concoctions of herbs and coaxed nourishing liquids down his constricted throat. They weaned him from liquids to solid food, and drew his mind from the dark madness into plain despair. And from despair towards a cold acceptance of his fate.

When they left they knew he would fly again. The suit had been examined and was found to have suffered no serious damage, its mysterious energies were still active. It had been carefully unscrambled and hung in its special rack, wings extended, the pointed helmet with its reflective gold visor hanging limp between the spread talons.

Seven days later the flyer put it on and rode again the high swift-flowing rivers of air. And so he continued to watch, many times daily scanning the horizon. At times willing something to happen with a fierce desire, a desperate wish for there to be an end to his vigil. Then he would fold his wings and it would be over.

And so it was as he hovered far to the south, high in the web of streaming air currents, that he saw the first signs of the phenomenon for which many generations of flyers had spent their lives watching and waiting.

Due south the hazy grey band of the horizon was split by a hair-thin white line. Running east and west the fine thread of light faded into distance. As he watched it grew clearer and brighter. Whatever it was it was certainly coming nearer. Turbulent pockets of air began to make hovering

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difficult.

Suddenly, the first joy he had felt in two years made him cry out. With a wild scream he swooped down through the upper air, the wind shrieking past his helmet and whistling through his blade-feathers. Fiercely he beat his way towards the onrushing white strip.

Soon it was obvious what he was looking at. A two hundred foot wall of water, topped by seething white foam, was racing across the south plain. As far as he could see from east, through south, to west the mighty wave extended.

Cold powerful winds blowing off the deep green water slammed against him, and he had to fight every second to keep control.

He thought of the people in the valley, unaware of their terrible and imminent fate. He was helpless. Even if he could outfly the wave his warning would be of no use. There could be no avoiding the catastrophe. The wave would crash down into the valley, millions of tons of water falling two thousand feet. The image was too terrifying to grasp clearly. Every vestige of village, farms, cattle and people would be utterly destroyed, and the wave would sweep on across the northern plain, covering everything.

Nothing could stand against this dreadful power, except perhaps the rock tower. With a sudden shock he realized the function of the flyers. The tower was tall, if it survived the initial shock its greater part would remain clear of the rushing waters. The significance of the stock-pile of food, texts and tools in the caves of the eyrie was now clear.

In remote times, before the raging fires, someone had foreseen the present cataclysm. The valley had been prepared and the line of flyers founded. From the loins of the two surviving flyers a new race was meant to spring. But now, on the last day, he was alone. In the face of this final irony the fate of the people of the valley seemed of little consequence.

Thirty feet from the enormous curving wall of water he stopped fighting the turbulent air and allowed the surging wind to carry him along. As if held in magnetic fields he stayed only a short distance in front of the wave, moving at the same speed. He stared fascinated into the streaming green surface, now towering nearly a hundred feet above him. Strange movements of light and dark unconnected with the motion of the water caught his attention.

Images began to form behind the glassy screen. Forests and hills teeming with wild creatures. High mountains, snow-peaked against deep blue skies. Volcanoes, avalanches, earthquakes. A crescent moon over limitless black water. A falling star. Cities of stone flaming and melting. Summer fields of golden corn, orchards and orange groves. Naked girls dancing on green lawns. A great bridge of filigree metal spanning two mountain ranges. Domes, towers, and gates of silver and gold. And behind all a strange and terrible music that froze his heart and brought tears to his eyes.

The images faded, but the music became more intense, rising to an unbearable pitch. Suddenly it stopped. In the uncanny silence that followed he found he was looking directly at his lost mate. Her black hair streamed about her face, expanding and contracting in rhythmic flowing movements like a fantastic sea anemone. She was smiling at him, her eyes full of light, beckoning.

With an anguished cry, he beat at

(cont. on page 95)

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THE PI-A-SAW BIRD

Richard Stooker makes his professional debut with this, a fantasy based on Indian legend . . .

RICHARD STOOKER

Illustrated by MICHAEL NALLY

As we coasted along rocks frightful for their height and length, we saw a monster painted on one of the rocks, which startled us at first, and upon which the boldest Indian dare not gaze long. It is as large as a calf, with horns on the head like a deer, a frightful look, red eyes, bearded like a tiger, the face somewhat like a man's, the body covered with scales, and the tail so long that it makes the turn of the body, passes over the head and down between the legs, ending at last in a fish's tail. Green, red, and a kind of black are the colors employed.

— Excerpt from Pere Marquette's journal of his voyage down the Mississippi River in 1673.

Chief Ouatoga crouched in the prairie grass on the bluff top. The night was moonless. In the dim starlight, he watched Laughing Moon, his daughter of sixteen summers, on the edge of the bluff. She was waiting for someone. The Father of Waters, the Mississippi River, flowed far below them.

Several nights ago Ouatoga had awakened and noticed she was gone from his hut. She didn't return until late. When she sneaked away repeatedly, Ouatoga asked her where she went.

Laughing Moon had blushed, looked frightened and said, "Just for a walk."

Ouatoga decided to investigate. If she was seeing a brave man who was worthy of her, Ouatoga didn't mind. They could marry as quickly as possible. But he had to be sure.

A dark shape appeared on the edge of the bluff and lifted itself up silently to the top.

Ouatoga bunched his eyebrows together. Why did he climb the bluff face instead of just walking up the path from the village?

The man stood up and put his arms around Laughing Moon. She laughed softly. He bent his head towards her.

Ouatoga couldn't stand any more. He knew now why Laughing Moon had looked frightened when he questioned her. The man was not an Illiniwek. He was an Osage, an enemy. Ouatoga quickly strung his bow and notched an arrow. He stood up.

"Get away," he shouted to Laughing Moon.

He never imagined she'd disobey. Before this, she'd always been a good daughter. She'd always done what he'd told her. Seeing an Osage was wrong, but he felt sure she'd realize her mistake at once.

So when he shot he thought only of

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the intended target.

Ouatoga aimed at the man's breast. He couldn't miss at that range. But Laughing Moon didn't jump away. She fell back against her lover. Her father's stone arrowhead sliced through her throat. There was a spurt of dark red, and her eyes became dull and unmoving.

The Osage man didn't cry out or reach for his bow. He only shot a look of hatred at Ouatoga. Then he picked Laughing Moon up in his arms gently. Before Ouatoga could shoot or even move again, the Osage walked slowly to the edge of the cliff and jumped off.

A long while later, Ouatoga forced himself to look down at the great river which was his only daughter's burial mound. He had once thought he could throw all his troubles and worries into the water like a load of garbage, and the current would carry it away from him.

That was a bitter thought as he trudged back to the village.

Ouatoga's tribe, the Illiniwek, lived in a small break in the high rocky bluffs lining the east side of the Mississippi. But at the spot the river jogged, running west to east. There was an abundance of fish, game, and fertile soil.

Ouatoga had led them well for many seasons. They had never suffered famine in his time, nor lost a battle. As far off as the great northern lakes, men trembled with fear at his name.

He had the strength of a man far younger than himself. His face was ploughed with scars, and with the deep lines of much worry. He had a wife named Wauniti and a son of twenty summers called Utim.

As a young chief, Ouatoga had once dreamed of the Great Spirit in the

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form of the rising sun. The next day he had had a picture of it tatooed on his back. Because of that, he knew the Great Spirit was always with him.

And until tonight he had never doubted it. Never thought he could stray from serving the Great Spirit. He'd always been happy. Always satisfied with how he governed the tribe. He'd killed only its enemies.

Now, for the first time he felt as though the sun tattoo on his back were sinking instead of rising.

After lying down on his sleeping mat, he had trouble keeping his eyes closed for long. And when he finally did, a nightmare came.

An awesome storm descended on the tribe. Chill rain fell in stinging torrents that tortured bare skin. Thunderclaps pounded and reverberated across the heavens. Jagged lightning bolts struck the prairie, setting fire to the dry grass on the hills nearby. The flames lit the cloud-darkened sky with a demonic glow, casting misshapen shadows across the horizon.

His people hid. But the fury found them wherever they took shelter. The tempest flattened their huts. The Father of Waters climbed out of its bed and rose higher and higher. Raging fires cut off their escape in back. Some tried to climb up the steep face of the bluffs, but were plucked off by the wind and thrown into the swirling river.

And everywhere Ouatoga looked, he saw the twisted, tortured face of Laughing Moon.

Ouatoga woke up sweating and shaking. He knew the dream had been sent by the Great Spirit to tell him a disaster was about to come to his people. And Ouatoga was helpless to stop it.

HE WAS STILL WORRIED and irritable the next morning. He didn't know what to expect. He didn't know what to say about Laughing Moon's disappearance.

Dawn's light was just beginning to appear downstream as he washed in the river along with several other men. The tribe's women had gotten up earlier. They now collected fallen branches and stirred the coals of the fires to life. The children yelped and played games in the woods.

The far-off screeching grew audible gradually. A black speck appeared in the west over the river. It was a giant bird coming from upstream, flying faster than a hawk. Its cries were like thorns piercing the back of Ouatoga's neck. Green scaly feathers covered its body. Red wings flapped with the sound of thunder. It had antlers like a deer, a fierce, frightening grimace, and long straggly hair on its chin. The tail was three times as long as its body, and ended in a fish's fin. Large, sharp claws were outstretched as it flew directly towards the village.

Ouatoga was climbing up the riverbank as the bird approached. He threw himself on the ground, burying his face in the dust and clutching the roots of the grass as hard as he could.

There were screams of agony. Ouatoga raised his head and saw the bird carry Mugangout, a burly warrior, away in its talons.

Ouatoga picked himself up. He felt very old and very weak. The scourge he'd been warned about had begun. There would be more victims. And the Great Spirit no longer supported Ouatoga.

The tribe began to return slowly to its interrupted activities. But the people would do the dance of death tonight. And they'd hear the wailing of Mugangout's mother and widow.

They assumed Laughing Moon was

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another of the bird's victims. Ouatoga couldn't bring himself to tell them the truth.

Once or twice a week at dawn, the great bird emerged from its bone-littered cave five miles to the west. It carried back the first man, woman or child it caught out in the open. The people called it the Pi-a-saw Bird, the Bird that Devours Men. They never knew when it would come out next.

Nothing could stop it. Ouatoga ordered his men to shoot at it. But their arrows bounced off its hard, armored skin. Kohale the medicine man worked every spell he knew to drive away evil spirits. The bird always returned.

Kohale came to Ouatoga's hut after the Pi-a-saw Bird had taken ten victims. The roof of his hut was covered with bark slabs and cattail mats. But the sides were open to allow the hot air to flow out. Wauniti was out in front, roasting a chunk of deer meat over a small, nearly smokeless cooking fire.

Using her knee-length deerskin skirt to protect her fingers, Wauniti picked up a hot rock from the fire and dropped it into an earthenware pot filled with water and cobs of maize. With a loud hiss, the stone began heating the kettle's contents.

"Come in and enjoy the shade," Ouatoga said. He moved several highly decorated clay bowls off the other grass mat. His bow and arrows, clothing, and ceremonial pipes were piled in a corner.

Kohale sat down. He was short and lean. His grizzled face showed much wear and tear. His eyes had the inward-turned, grief-filled gaze every medicine man acquires.

After the preliminary greetings and inquiries required by courtesy, Kohale said, "It's up to you."

Ouatoga studied his face. "The Pi-a-saw?"

Kohale said nothing.

"But I can't."

"You must."

"The Great Spirit has left me. I'm old, and worthless to the tribe."

Kohale put his hand on Ouatoga's shoulder. "Who else is there to help us?"

"You think I like seeing my people taken away and eaten? But what can I do? The Great Spirit's left me."

"You keep saying that. But what do you mean? Why should the Great Spirit leave you?"

Ouatoga stared down at the floor in misery. "I can't tell you."

"Something's wrong. But don't you see? You must tell me. It's not just your problem, it's the whole village's. We're all suffering."

Ouatoga sighed. "Can't I have any peace?"

"It doesn't look that way."

Ouatoga folded his arms and bowed his head. "You're right. My problems don't count. You're an old friend. I can tell you. But no one else must know. Not even Wauniti. Especially her."

"Of course not."

"It was the night before the first attack. I followed Laughing Moon. I wanted to see if he was good enough for her. On the bluff top . . . an Osage. I shot at him, but hit her instead. It was an accident. But I can't forgive myself. The Great Spirit sent me a terrible dream that night. He's forsaken me. My strength is gone. I've been like an old woman. Do you see now?"

"I see that if the Great Spirit is angry with a village's chief, that village is in trouble. You must find him again. Cleanse yourself. Ask the Great Spirit for help. There is no other

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way."

Ouatoga nodded. He didn't like it. He didn't look forward to the ordeal. But it was the only thing he could do. "I'll go away," he said. "I'll do nothing for half a moon but fast and ask for his help. If he doesn't answer by then . . . it'll be up to Utim to lead you."

Kohale said, "It's good." He pulled a clay pipe and some tobacco out of his pouch. The pipe was molded in the shape of a human head, finely painted and designed by Terahonawaka, the tribe's artisan and arrow maker.

They lit the herb with a brand from the fire, and smoked. Its fragrance helped repel evil spirits.

Ouatoga rose the next morning before the rest of the village was stirring. After putting on his breechcloth and soft-soled moccasins, he blackened his face and left. He climbed to the top of the steep bluffs in darkness and headed west.

All day in the broiling sun, Ouatoga edged along the face of the cliff. Broken and uneven, the bluffs provided many ledges, footpaths and handholds. The ground was littered with thin chunks of sandstone. He found tiny shells in the ground high above the river. And in certain rocks he saw pictures of plants and shells which no one had carved.

He passed a wide creek and later a large, blue pool bounded by high cliffs. By evening he discovered two caves in the bluffs. One was dry and dusty. Several large boulders lay in front of it, tumbled together as if they'd been casually tossed there by some giant hand.

Farther on and down, Ouatoga came across what he named Spring Cave. A creek flowed from deep inside. Once out of the cave, it fell ten feet, splashed noisily on the ground below, and trickled down the slope of the bluff.

Ouatoga dipped his fingers into the cool water. He lifted a handful to his mouth and quenched his thirst.

There was a boulder on each side of the cave. By standing on the left one, Ouatoga could climb onto an isolated niche in the cliff. It was just large enough for him to sit in with his legs folded. This was a good spot, he decided, to spend half a moon fasting and praying to the Great Spirit of Life.

He spent the nights on a bed of leaves in Dry Cave, where an overhanging ledge sheltered him from rain. In the daytime he sat by Spring Cave, and stared out over the clear, clean wide waters of the Mississippi, its waves sparkling and glittering in the sunlight.

He could see a short way to his left where the line of bluffs ended, sloping down and merging into flat prairie land. The mottled gray, white and brown cliffs continued far to the west. The flat land on the opposite bank was covered with long grass brown and parched beyond the river's edge. Ten miles straight ahead, Ouatoga knew, there was another large river which flowed into the Mississippi several miles farther downstream. All creeks, streams, and rivers eventually joined the Father of Waters.

Ouatoga began to see that there was a pattern linking the land and all living things. The Illiniwek, the lesser men, animals, insects and plants were a part of it. Controlling all was the Great Spirit. Ouatoga sought to cleanse himself and merge entirely into the great order of things.

He prayed constantly for guidance. And he pleaded with the Great Spirit to save his people from the Pi-a-saw

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Bird so that they could live without fear. But the days passed without an answer.

He fasted, living on nothing but the water from Spring Cave. He ignored the hunger pangs. His belly shrank into a little ball. The skin around his waist, chest, and legs tightened as he lost weight. The weakness of undernourishment grew in him, adding to the weariness of his aging body.

Finally the moon and run through almost half its cycle, and Ouatoga had still not contacted the Great Spirit. One night remained. Too discouraged and tired to get up, Ouatoga curled up, knees against his chest, and lay down in his niche. The back of his head and neck rested on the hard stone. The moon shone serenely on the water's surface. But Ouatoga knew no peace.

It seemed as though the river and the Great Spirit had abandoned his people forever.

His body grew lighter. His head felt fuzzy. He fell asleep to the droning, murmuring noise of the falling water.

Ouatoga slipped deeper and deeper into unconsciousness. All awareness of his body left him. He drifted like a wraith to a dark, black land. It was warm. The air was thick. Then a bright dazzling light burned in front of him, a thousand times brighter than the fiery globe he carried the picture of on his back. Ouatoga turned his face away. It was the Great Spirit of Life.

It spoke to him. Not in words, but Ouatoga understood. The Pi-a-saw Bird had a soft underbelly. To trap it, a brave warrior must offer himself up as bait. At dawn the next day, he should stand on top of the bluffs with twenty warriors hiding behind him. When the Pi-a-saw Bird attacked him, they would be close enough to shoot poisoned arrows into the bird's vulnerable spot. That was the only way to atone for Laughing Moon and save the tribe.

When Ouatoga woke up that morning, all weariness had left him. He rejoiced and was eager to return. He paused long enough only to wash the black soot and dirt from his face and paint it vermillion and blue, the colors of a triumphant warrior.

On his return, the tribe met in council. Throughout the afternoon and night the people prepared for the battle. They hunted copperheads for their poison. Terahonawaka fitted flint heads onto wooden shafts and then dipped them into the collected venom. Ouatoga selected twenty warriors, including Utim, to kill the monster.

"But who will stand and offer himself to the bird?" Kohale demanded.

"I will," Ouatoga said.

"You!"

"I'm almost an old man. And I feel as though my hair were already silver, and my bones brittle. I'm the one the tribe needs least."

"You're wrong," Kohale said. "We need your guidance most."

"My only thought now is for the tribe. I'm the one who deserves to die. I won't have a needed warrior take my place."

"It isn't because of Laughing Moon, is it? You can't sacrifice yourself for her memory."

"She's got nothing to do with it. You can't change my mind. Go away and leave me alone."

Before a gathering of the tribe, the archers, dressed in war feathers, visited Ouatoga's hut. They threw a stuffed bird, a falcon or crow—whatever their token—onto a skin stretched out in front. Then they danced the cere-

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monial war dance pledging their loyalty and chanted a rite to their guiding spirit:

"Oh, falcon (or crow), I pray to you that when I pursue the enemy I may go with the same speed in running as you in flying, that I may be admired by my comrades and feared by my enemies."

Utim was the last to approach Ouatoga. He had the big-boned, muscular frame of his father. Ouatoga had trained the boy until he excelled at games, feats of strength, and marksmanship. Ouatoga had great confidence that his son would make a good chief when he was gone.

An hour before dawn, Ouatoga led the men into the chill night. He selected a high spot on the bluff, surrounded by tall grass and trees the warriors could hide behind. The face of the cliff below them was flat—a sheer drop to the river.

As he waited, Ouatoga brushed the gnats and mosquitoes away. It seemed odd that the smallest of flying things annoyed him now, just before the largest devoured him.

The stars shone like sparkling pebbles on the bottom of the night-sky river of darkness. Ouatoga breathed deeply of the fresh air. He realized then how good it was to be alive, despite sorrow, hunger and approaching old age. He didn't want to die.

He looked to the east and pulled his red blanket close around him. It would be dawn soon. The hiden archers remained still, as they had been trained.

The sun lit the eastern sky, sending its pallid beams across the land and water.

Ouatoga turned to the west towards the Pi-a-saw Bird's cave. His body seemed a series of barely connected bones loosely draped with flesh. Never before had he felt so small, fragile and weak. To keep from thinking of the danger, he prayed to the Great Spirit of Life and sang war chants. His life was not important—only the tribe's.

A sharp cry shattered the early morning stillness. An involuntary shudder rippled down Ouatoga's spine.

Its wings flapping with the sound of the moaning west wind, the Pi-a-saw Bird left its lair and circled in the sky, looking for its prey. It spotted Ouatoga immediately.

With another loud shriek, it flew towards him. Lightning flashed from its eyes.

Ouatoga groaned silently and dug his toes and heels into the dew-covered ground. He was determined to stand firm. He couldn't look away from its sharp fangs and demonic red eyes.

Closer and closer it came, filling the sky. Those yellowed claws were outstretched. Ouatoga closed his eyes.

He'd been wounded several times in the past. But this wrenching pain tearing into his shoulders was worse than anything he'd ever felt before. The world went red. He passed out, but came to an instant later when the bird lifted him into the air.

The warriors raised their bows and released their arrows. The feathered shafts pierced the red soft underside of the Pi-a-saw Bird's wings and belly.

It screeched in outrage, and tried to fly higher, dropping Ouatoga as it did. The archers continued to bombard it. Soon, the poison spread and took effect.

His pain deadened by shock now, Ouatoga could watch the end. Giant wings flapping convulsively, the Pi-a-saw Bird rolled off the bluff, scratching furrows in the sod, and fell over

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the edge into the river.

The warriors gathered around Ouatoga. But there was nothing they could do. The front of his chest was torn away. The claws had penetrated deeply into his lungs. His blood flowed out onto the ground.

But Ouatoga smiled to himself. His people were safe now. He could die in peace.

He reached out a hand to his son. "Lead them well, Utim," he said. "And dance happily tonight. The Pi-a-saw will never strike again. You must celebrate. You must be very happy. That's my last command."

Utim's grip on his hand tightened, but, like a good warrior, he didn't cry.

Ouatoga closed his eyes. He had no more to say to the living. He wanted to concentrate. After the mental anquish he'd felt since Laughing Moon's death, this sharp physical pain was fresh and wholesome. It washed away his guilt.

The world was turning black. Ouatoga lay on his back in the prairie grass on the bluff top and opened himself up to the overwhelming darkness.

The great Spirit returned to him.

All day and night the Illiniwek feasted, played games, and danced to celebrate. They cheered Utim. They thanked the Great Spirit for their safety. In the morning, Terahonawaka took his pigments and painted a picture of the Pi-a-saw Bird on the flat bluff face where it had died.

From that time on, all men passing by on the river in their dugout canoes shot an arrow at the menacing figure to remind themselves of the chieftain Ouatoga and the Great Spirit of Life.

—RICHARD STOOKER

The Flyer (cont. from page 87)

the air, forcing himself out of the net of pressures that held him. Slowly he rose above the foaming crest, and once free of the cooler air began to climb more rapidly. Exerting every ounce of energy he spiralled upwards. His mind overflowing with her image, he struggled higher and higher. Eventually the thinning air offered no further support and he rested, hovering in the high altitude winds.

He looked down. The wave had crashed over the cliff and was already many miles out on the northern plain. At the base of the cliff a thin line of white was all that could be seen of the raging impact of the falling water.

The rock tower still stood, cutting the wild flow like a knife.

He remained at an enormous height letting the streaming winds bear him up. The bright sun turned into a swollen red globe on the western horizon. In the east a thin crescent moon shone in a darkening sky.

He watched the sun swallowed up by its own sanguine reflection, and stared for a long time into the green afterglow. Soon the stars shone brightly in a black sky. The slender moon cast a pale radiance on the fast swell of water beneath.

The flyer faced in turn each of the cardinal points, rotating slowly. Then, folding his wings, he plummeted towards the dark ocean.

A tiny flash of foam marked his entry, and the immensity of waters rolled on under the passive moon.

The cliff had moved under the pressures of the cataclysm and now the rock tower was without tilt. It stood straight, a vertical monolith pointing at the zenith.

Waiting.

—COLIN SAXTON

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PANDORA'S CRYOGENIC BOX

All old Sam wanted was a new wife, but what he got was altogether something else . . .

FELIX C. GOTSCHALK

I HAD A TINY BLIP of a hemorrhoid, about like a bright red jellybean, and I had just shifted in the graviton-chaise to try to ease the pain. My somesthetic implants felt good, like slick warm fish undulating lazily in my viscera, and I lay back and reached for the anoxia mask. I'll be double-damned if old Sam Burkhardt didn't come busting right through the ingress port, irising it like it was his very own burrow-hole.

"My house-bot might have restrained the stuffings out of you, Sam," I said. The big dumshit looks at me with his asymmetric leer and his yellow canines. "Your house-robot's dun gone to git a grease-job, Henry. I jes' saw her on the ped-walk."

"Well, what did you come busting in her for?"

"Old Luther's provobot's beatin the piss outta him outside—come on an' look." I wouldn't say I was overanxious, but I got out of the chaise right quick, and Sam and I shouldered through the egress membrane together. Sure enough, there's Luther, lying in the orange dirt in front of the brothel reprod. He's raising himself on one elbow, trying to get up. I tried to take Luther once, when I was a young buck, and he whipped me so bad I'da swore he had three or four operable fists. Then he developed a genuine mean streak, and the Synod put a provost robot with him. Well anyway, he's raising himself up a little, and the provobot's standing there like Goliath himself, all silver-colored, and whining those circuit-pak energy sounds. People came out of the saloon and the chink laundry and the butcher shop to watch the fight.

"Ahm'd gonna stomp your side-windin' ass," Luther says, getting up and shaking his head right smart.

"You shit too, effen you eat regler!" Sam bawls out at Luther. Old Luther turns to see who said that, and while he's looking right at Sam (if looks could kill), the provobot crunches Luther smack in the temple—*whollock!* He goes down like he's made of wet cement and lays right still.

"Sneaky pneumoflex bastard!" Sam hollers at the bot, "you whopped him while hiz haid wuz turned!" The great silver form bends from its swivelled midsection and lifts Luther like he was a little puppy. God, the whole notion of physical strength goes out the window when you see a robot do a simple visuo-motor act. The bot

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notches Luther into the airsled and swishes off, leaving a rooster-tail of orange dirt hanging in the dry air. The people go back inside, and me and Sam stand there, fanning the dirt away from our faces. Sam nudges me in the ribs and giggles: "At air were a goodun," he says, "thet bot's gone plum kill Luther, effen he don't stop fottin' him s'much.

"He'd be fine if he had a hypothalamic implant," I said.

"He'd rather get taken apart than get hisself changed," Sam scoffs, "He's tuffer'n leather and mean aza sneck—"

"And he likes it that way—"

"You fuckin-A right he does."

"Well now, he's a maladapt, isn't he?"

"That's whut the gummint sez," Sam scoffs again, making a teasing little effeminate wave, "but whut do they know?" I look at Sam and try to see some glimmer of logic in his talk, but the visual analogy I get is a brakeless garbage truck rolling down a hill. He keeps on looking at me, and then his face lights up—

"I almost forgot —I come over cuz mah ole lady's holes are 'bout awl closed, en ah want to trade her in on somethin' more better."

"Well, come on in," I say, and we walk back to my burrow. I crank up the trivid-cube deck and scan the readouts: 42% of the town's settlers have died off as a result of aperture closure, and all of us, one-hundred percent—all 92 of us, have some degree of closure. I've been burgomeister here for several calendrical tiers now, and I've always known that the air is so bad that anyway it can get inside you has to be shut or filtered or used very damn carefully. The eyes usually go first: the particulates cause them to feel like pebbles in a bag, and then the ptosis starts, and it's like a wound growing shut. And, what's worse (or maybe better), is that the closure is evolutionarily adaptive—that sounds like expertise, doesn't it? Well, as chock-full of saturate-locus data as I am, I damn well ought to be an expert. And, if you don't like it, you can have my job. This is my sixth life-span role, and I'm getting geriatric and more than a little cranky. Well, I'm getting off the track, let's see—Oh yeah, Sam wants a new consort (a fuckingmat is all he really needs), and I am supposed to assign him somebody from the meat-rack, if it is true that his old lady can't do the recepto-ingress bit anymore. Sam says she got blinko in '03 and her olfaction went out the next year. Her audio slits melded together during the flood-tide equinox, and her alimentary ingress port about one tier later. Viability was still no problem ("no problem aye-tawl", Sam says), since she was still a first-rate fuckeroo and didn't mind sodomizing. And Sam makes a big deal—a busting big rhapsodic hyperbole, about how good it is to have a cunt shrink on you, and how it fostered a genuine rebirth of his rutting instinct. I say it's very damn good too, but the law of diminishing utility sets in earlier than you think.

Anyway, Sam's cranial wattage is not exemplary (I say about centile 15, but he claims it's at the 40th, plus or minus two degrees of Gaussian freedom), and he keeps looking at me, like a dog wanting a piece of eye-of-the-round.

"You got the trivid cube data with you?" I ask him, looking past his grizzled physiog-plate at the shimmering force-field wall.

"Effen a hobby-hawze's got a wooden asshole, ah heve," he says,

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handing me the cube. I keep wishing he would leave, so I get right to it. I notch the cube in the refractor and the holographic mold materializes: a rather frog-faced female, moderately hunch-backed, with long, ball-socketed arms, legs like a centaur, and bilateral mammectomy scars. "Go on," Sam urges, prodding me with his hand, and sniffling a long insnort, "she ain' got no more holes, s'help me Gawd." I sigh a little bit and tell Sam to keep his pants on, but that's the wrong thing to say to him, because it just makes him hornier. I press the life-systems index and scan the read-outs: sure enough, the woman has no functional ingress or egress ports. She is blind, deaf, mute, and cannot taste or smell or breathe. The vaginal-urinary tract is fused the defecatory one also.

"We bin bung-holin' for 'bout six muntz," Sam says, "the radiation mart kept her alive, and she might want a colost-tube, but, I mean, I don' hev to keep her, do I, Henry?"

"No," I say, "she's non-funct, pure and simple, let's have a look at you—" "Aw, ah'm fine as silk, Hen," he says, turning away, but I grab him by the dorsal fin, and tweak his hindquarters. "Hey, thet smarts!" he whines, "you know ah mot jes bus yo ass, don't you?"

"You might, but you won't," I say, "after all, who'd authorize your chit-terlings blastulas, and your amphet blatters—and who the hell else but me would have the patience to set and place electrocheckers with you?" Sam starts to smile, and he drools a little. "You ole summuvabitch, you," he says, and he starts to hug me, but I put out my hand. I get him on the examining pod and flick on the tractor-beams. His vision reads 20/900 dextral, 20/10 sinistral (God, he's one-sided), and his olfactgustatory limens are at centile 10. Audition is within normal limits, though one of his ear-petals looks like a piece of bruised liver, and his mouth like a surgical slash with loose stiches. He can still piss like a cow on a flat rock, ejaculate, and has a functional rectal port.

"You still a cunt hound, Sam?" I ask, thocking his genital pod, and reading the androgen cumulates at centile 70.

"Ain't nuthin' no better, and you know it well as me," he says.

"You're getting old, though."

"Well, hit jus' takes me all night to do whut I used to do all night," he says, laughing a harsh salivary croak.

I can't help but feel some omnipotence, you know, what with being burgomeister and all, and I rare back on my filmy chaise and reach for a vegetable cigar. Old Sam looks at me helplessly and starts to squirm in the tractor-beam field. I light the reefer, rather ritualistically, and try to inhale some of the blue-gray smoke, but it is far too strong, even sooty. I look away for a few seconds, knowing that Sam is getting mad, and then I spin and turn off the beams and he tumbles off the pod in a flailing kinesthetic scramble. I'm laughing like hell, and he's cussing and snorting at me. But then I start to walk toward the meat-racks, and he turns all respectful and friendly. I estimate we have 300 young females in the storage racks, all gift-wrapped in filmy shifts and robes, and just about the freshest and prettiest cryogenic specimens you'd ever want to see. And we don't stash them supine in filing drawers either—*no* sir! they're on display in the arborium behind my burrow, and, if I do say so myself, it is an inspiring display even if we old dogs do call it the meat-

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rack.

Well, I whistle a teasing little convoluted line as we walk through the tunnel. Sam is wheezing Sterno and Taco breath over my shoulder as I thumbprint the bulkhead and it irises open. "Good Gawd Amighty," Sam sighs, looking at the rows of perfect bodies and faces, "hit's enough to give a man a coronary. I ain't nevah seen such pulkritwed—"

"Where did you learn a word like that?" I ask him, but he tells me never mind, that he ain't so dumb as I think. He walks along the row slowly, stopping and looking up at the fresh sweet sleeping faces and the perfectly contoured bodies.

"Angels," he sighs, "it's a whole pack—a whole host of fuckin' angels!"

"Divine would be a better word than fuck—"

"Yeah, I know," Sam says, oblivious of me beside him, "I know—deevine," and his voice has a vague glint of awe in it. We walk past Caucs and Negs, Chinks and Indians, Austroids and Indos. Here's a lovely Geisha, and a Malaysian maid, and a Bantu and a Sudanese.

"Thank ah'll stick wif a young white gal, Hen," he says, "en ah doan want no smart-aass—"

"You mean you want a dumb one?"

"Wal, you know, ah doan want one whuts smarter than me—"

"You do want a dumb one," I tease.

"Wail, by damn, I thank ah dew!" Sam says, making the decision sound serious. We've looked at fifty or so girls, and coded the choices down to Cauc virgins with centile ten cranial wattage, equivalent to about 80 old IQ points. About six young bodies shimmer with coded light, and Sam looks at each one carefully, then picks out a big tall Alabama girl with acne on both cheeks. "Ah'll try thisun here," he says, pointing.

"She's not cheap," I say, reading her identocube, "she's strong and robust and adaptive—and strictly a one-man woman, loyal to the core of her personapak.

"Will she lak fuckin?" Sam asks, looking at the long thighs and calves.

"Programmed for coitional hedonism at centile 80—yes, she will."

"How much?"

"Fucking?"

"No—*cost*, you ole' dawg."

"You can lease her for twenty old world dollars per day, or a ten-tier lien on your life expectancy parameters.

"Any strings to the deal?"

"One. You have to forfeit her if you can't make your quotas on the work roster. What kind of work are you doing now?"

"Work—schmerk, they've had me farmin' truffle-grids the past two tiers, en hit's easy. Ah sit on my ass and watch the flitters spray the fields, and ah punch in the air traffic codes."

"Hey," I say, remembering, "you get some barter credits as a troubador, don't you?" Sam scratches his leathery skull. "You mean when ah sangs dirty songs at the smokers?"

"Right."

"Well, yeah, ah dew—"

"Well, you're in like Flynn," I say, and I can't help feeling a little glad for the old man. He's dumpy and smelly, but he's tough and emo-resilient, "you can just about afford her, with almost nothing to spare." Sam looks hungrily at the girl. "Well, wheel her outta thar then—le's hev a looky at her."

"Thumb-print this," I say, handing him the archival release forms. He keeps looking up at the tall girl, and sticks his big chondric thumb out to me. He doesn't care what it is he's signing, he sure wants that big tall

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gal. I code in the ennervation data and start to walk away. Sam just stands there, gaping, if you can call a crack-mouth slobber a gape.

We sit in the office while the cryogenic decoding pak whirs and clicks and clacks and sings. We dispatch the charbots to get Sam's old woman shuttled off for re-cycling, and get the archival checks on chattels in his burrow. The cylinder with Sam's new consort in it is standing in the corner of the room, and I can see the girl's face begin to rosy up a bit.

"Whut's her name, Hen?" Sam Says.

"Pandora," I say, bending over the control panel.

"Whut the hail kinda name is thet?"

"I don't know. What do you care what her name is? Call her anything you want—" The screen begins to blip little oscillographic red bars and the HUMAN ERROR bar lights up, bright and flashing.

"What's wrong?" Sam asks, looking dimly worried, "she's the rot one, ain't she?"

"Quiet," I rasp, wondering what's wrong myself. I'm no goddamn cryogenic expert. The tape cubes spin and clack and rewind, and an innocent looking readout snips out and into my hand:

THE SUBJECT'S CRANIAL WATTAGE IS AT CENTILE 80.

YOU HAVE CODED 80 AS AN IQ EQUIVALENT.

CENTILE 80 CORRESPONDS TO IQ 115 ± 1 df.

VERIFY YOUR CODING INSTRUCœ TIONS.

"Punched in the wrong codes, dammit," I say, looking over at the girl's body in the clear cocoon-like cylinder, "she's not dumb—she's smart—"

"Well, ah don't keer!" Sam blurts, putting his hand on my wrist, "ah wants this here big gal."

"She'll be trouble, Sam," I say, but I can see that he means business, "she has got the smarts enough to give you a peck of trouble."

"Wail, ah'll jus' bust her leetle ass effen she gits outta line."

"Remember now, she's bigger than you are, too, and she may have some im—what the hell, I forgot to check her for implants—wait." And I bend back over the coding board, use my left index finger as an abscissa and my right as an ordiante, and I punch in the cross-hatched IMPLANT intersection. Jesus Aich Christ, the girl has a fulcrum-power kinesthetic pak, plus a triple glottis. She could kick the shit out of Sam and sing an 80 decibel aria on the side.

"You don't need her, Sam," I say, turning, but he's over next to her, stroking the cylinder, and watching the rosy flesh glow spreading down over her shoulders.

"I want her, I want her, goddamit!" he shouts, stamping his huge heavy hooves on the deck. The girl's eyelids flutter and her mouth opens ever so slightly. Sam begins to tense up, in something like a gunfighter posture, and he moves his feel like a stallion pawing the turf.

"Ah want her, and ah'm agoin' to git her," he says, and the damn old fool grabs the cylinder in a bear-hug and tries to nuzzle the girl through the glass.

"Sit down, you old fart," I say, "she won't be ready for another hour anyway, and you need some hard-nosed advice on what you're letting yourself in for." He flops into a chaise and looks boyish and pouting. I turn on some tranquil aerosol and sit down beside him. "You need to be protected from the effects of your poor judgment, Sam", I say, wondering if I

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even get halfway through to the old lecherous coot, "this girl's no consort for you. You won't be able to handle her."

"You jus' stick to your job, Henry," he says, "ah'm tellin' you for the las' time, ah wants thet gal."

"Okay," I say, and I know sure as hell what's going to happen, though, "you want a big loud strong Amazon? you gonna get yourself one."

"You fuckin-A right ah em," he says, and we drop into silence.

The time drags, but finally, the girls looks ready to come out of the shell: All the readings have edged into NORMAL loci, and the snake-like umbilici are dropping away from the life-system receptacles in the cylinder base. The girl stirs and her eyes open—

"Jes' lak tew flowrz bloomin!" Sam whispers, "come on out, you sweet leetle honey-pot!" The girl looks steadily at Sam, and she seems half incredulous and half amused. Oh shit, I think, it's not going to work out. Then the girl looks straight at me for a few seconds, and smiles like I was her daddy. Now, I'm better looking than Sam, but that is saying very damn little. The girl palms a phaser and defluxes the seams of the shell. The pieces fall away, soft as silk, and she takes a step out onto the deck, the prettiest Venus from a clamshell you'd ever want to see. She yawns and stretches her smooth white arms straight up, and Sam's eyes get big as saucers. I know he wants to bury his ugly face in those big soft breasts, and he probably wants to plain eat her with a spoon. Then he makes a real dumshit move and rushes at her.

"Baby dawl, come to yo' daddy!" he cries. The girl looks up with the most casual lilt of her head, and she must have auto-vectored a force-field isomorph, because the next thing Sam knows, he is knocked on his ass, and is trying to shake the amperage out of his tingling old body.

"What an uncompromisingly repulsive creature!" the girl says, in beautiful bell-like tones, and an accent like British royalty, "be so kind as to remove him at once." My mouth must have dropped far open, and I didn't know what to say, and the girl comes over to me. I'm not afraid of young girls, but this one seems fearless, if not all the way superordinate.

"Your stature and physiognomy are moderately pleasing to me," she says, smiling aloofly, yet with a coy cue or so, "tell me promptly, what is your role here? How may you serve me?" Sam is groaning on the deck and muttering "C'mere, you big tawl bitch," but Pandora ignores him. I try to assume a dominant stance, but the girl puts out some real gut-level charisma. I get steeled for trouble and tell her that I am not here to serve her—that she is here to serve Sam.

"Preposterous!" she pipes.

"Ah'm gonna whop yo' ass," Sam mutters, getting to his feet.

"No, Sam," I say, but the girl spins like a dancer and stun-bolts him to the deck again.

"I believe I requested this creature's removal," Pandora says, walking around the office, like an interior decorator wincing at grubby furnishings.

"Come, sit down," I say, trying to be firmly cordial, "let me tell you why you are here."

"I am perfectly aware of my role here. Now, tell me, or I shall wax petulant, what is *your* role here?"

"I am the president of thie city," I say, lying through my teeth.

"Come, you are obviously not a governing power-figure. You are a burgomeister in a burrow-group of geriatric quasi-humanoids—is this not

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so?"

"Well, I do run things here," I reply.

"Then run and obtain some food for me—say, some lamb crepes and nectar. I'm absolutely famished. And I shall require appropriate clothing, and a terracar—no, a teleporter, and a manse—"

"You're supposed to go home with Sam over there."

"I shan't dignify that statement with a response."

"Well now, you *have* to go with Sam—he bought you."

"Bought me! I am no chattel, and I most certainly will not go with that—that, whatever is he anyway?"

"He is a quasi-homo, like everybody here."

"Well, I shan't go with him. He offends me. He is a chancre on the white silk pillow of my existence. The subject is closed. Have you a nutritive console?" I nod at the food-deck, and she prances over and starts punching in choices.

"Get me a toga, please," she says, airily.

"See here, girl, don't go telling me what to do—"

"Come, dear, do be kind, or I shall be unhappy. Surely you have a cloak—something in satin or silk, say, nicely lined, and perhaps with a nice fur trim—come, get it at once."

"Well, of all the high-falutin' talk," I say, and the girl moves right over to me, and, by God, I can't even move out of my tracks. She moves her face right up to mine, and her breath is like musk and jasmine. My dick bolts up like a spring. She puts her arms around my neck and kisses me, making urgent little noises in her throat. Christ, my eyeballs break loose, and I start trembling, and try as I may, I cannot muster up any frontal lobe inhibitory cognition. My life feels compressed into my pikestaff. I try to get away from her, but I can't move, and then I feel that I don't want to move anyway. She releases me gently, then moves onto me again. Sam starts groaning again, and calling me a bastard, but I feel like stepping on him, like I'd skoosh a bug, exoskeleton and all.

"You'd love having a harem, wouldn't you, darling?" Pandora breathes into my mouth, and it is the sweet breath of life itself, "a harem of 80th power girls?" 80th *power*, I think, trying to stop the delicious spinning in my head, and the raw eorgeny of my marrow and bones and muscles and nerves.

"I tried to get Sam a girl with 80 IQ points," I say, weakly, and it all sounds lame and ludicrous, and then she folds another anesthetic kiss into me, "and I punched in 80 percentile points instead."

"No, dearest, you coded 80 exponential values. You know, my sweet, femininity to the 80th power! Isn't that wonderful?" I sag back on the chaise and try to realize what I've done but I can't even begin to think. Then, Pandora tells me to vaporize that creature on the floor, and I do that. Then she asks me to ennervate the remaining 299 cryogenic cylinders, and I do that too. Then she defluxes her sheath and my toga, and leads me to the coition pod. Three times I feel like I'm going to die of holistic internal convulsions, but I soar to the heavens instead, and I am the God of all Gods. And, think of it—I am to have a harem! 300 women—womanhood extrapolated to the 80th power!

"Come along, darling Henry," I hear the triple stereo of her bell-voice, "we have so much to do—we must get ready to welcome the girls."

—FELIX C. GOTSCHALK

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ZOWIE! IT SURE WAS THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMIC STRIPS!

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The 1930s saw the growth of a special entertainment medium: the adventure comic strip. Of dubious parentage (both the dime thriller and the movies were blamed), the lusty waif enjoyed no more than twenty years of fame before the onslaught of his own legitimate offspring, the TV adventure show.

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THE STRANGE CASE OF THE BIRDS

DAVID R. BUNCH

IT FIRST HAPPENED around ten o'clock one hot-summer August night, just after Wantus T. Gainal by private helicopter had helicoptered home from late-working at his very lucrative brokerage firm. Obeying some inexplicable urge, that had survived inexplicably through all the years, Wantus T. decided that instead of going on through the heliport hatch and down the polished stairs into the big house at once he would loaf awhile on the roof, look at the harvest-type moon and forget business. And that is when it happened. Or better to say, that is when it started to happen.

"Reminds me of when I was a tot," muttered Wantus T. to the night and himself, "somehow reminds of when I was just a little, innocent tad, stealing those big blue-green watermelons from old Farmer Gotz. In broad moonlight, because he was so old and blind. And selling them. Just for the fun of it, of course, naturally." Then he cleared his throat, in his best chairman-of-the-board clear, just before he did a thing he seldom did. Whereas usually he spent his waking hours looking slantwise down at reports, financial statements and other odd papers of business, or in staring straight out in sheer dominating glare at competitors and underlings, tonight at approximately ten o'clock Wantus T. Gainal looked up toward heaven. And that is when it happened. Or better to say, that is when it started to happen.

When Wantus T. looked up, he saw a full moon fluttering in the somewhat less than clear-blue air over an industrial center, the type we call "city with a pollution problem." "Can't see it so clear," muttered Wantus T. "Can't see it as clear as I used to see it when I was just a tot and used to raid old Gotz's patch." And certainly that was normal-true, for the night sky was its usual smog-piece over the roaring steel mills, the belching tire factories, the puffing oil refineries and the midget-car race tracks. But what bothered Wantus T. more, and I'm sure it would have bothered you the same, was what he saw in addition to the smog-socked moon. He saw an object across the moon's face, and it wasn't a beard on the old man there, either. It was a shallow, wavy V-shape with long, uneven arms, something like geese sometimes are when they race winter out of Canada with the first snowstorm almost on their backs. But unlike a V of geese, which is usually spare and clean and getting on down the sky as though late for the Ponds of Paradise, this shape was lazy and indolent, and it tended to stay in that same place on the moon where Wantus T. watched it. And moreover, to be more unlike the clean V of the goose flock, this shape had, where the arms of the wedge met, a ragged,

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bulbous mass hanging to make the whole effect not unlike that of a large shadow cast by a bloated, shaggy bird, one with uneven wings and no discernible head. Or maybe it was just a strange, never-before-seen type of spaceship—

Wantus T. was silent as he watched the thing on the moon, and in silence he brought to the object what passes in these times for courageous interest. He just looked, mildly detached, and thought, what happens in the sky is what happens in the sky, isn't it? these days. Then when Wantus T. tired, he yawned, blinked, was a little surprised at the dance he saw when he blinked, and looked at another piece of the moon. And great leaping preferred stocks and holy corporate gains! there was that bird, or ship, or whatever, on that other part of the moon. It had moved! and as Wantus T. followed it, it wavered out into the sky in a curious, uneven wing-slip to confound all flying. It just floated that blob of belly through the reaches of the sky on those uneven wings that seemed to ride on the easiest of air. Wantus T. watched it, and his eyes dropped with it toward and below the horizon to the northeast, where burned the lights of New York City. A little cry escaped him then, and we pardon it. Even the stern Wantus T.'s may cry out sometimes when they look at the sky and see a spook-bird, a strange spaceship, or some other unidentified floating object. We pardon it.

He charged to automatic-open on the heliport hatch, raced into the gleaming mansion, dodged priceless statuary and other expensive objects of art and puffed down polished stairs of inlay. At last he arrived in the Big Room, where his solid horse-faced wife, Phantus G., was sitting detached over some late fashion magazines and a diet wafer. She glanced up preparatory to saying, "Wantus T., you're late." But instead she said merely, "Oh—" because she could see that Wantus was in a state. His chest heaved and his eyes rolled behind the gold-rimmed lenses and his tongue could only say, "They're—they're—they're—" until finally he said what he had set out to say, "they're bombing New York City! To the ground! From the moon!"

At first wife Phantus G. took it as just another of Wantus T.'s little jokes. He'd been making them of late, cruel little jabs about the tense world situation, the big bombs, the astronauts, the unmanned space probes, the Peace Corps, and how all of it mattered really not a whit so long as business rode firm and comfortable on the ticker tape. "You're kidding?" said Phantus G.

"No!" gasped Wantus T.

"You mean, this is it?"

"Yes!" sobbed Wantus. "And I'm not glad. Once I thought I might be glad. Once I thought if something like this, a space war or something, would jazz up business—well—"

"Why aren't you glad?" asked Phantus severely. "Now?"

"I saw it! I saw it go down there! And I'm not glad."

Phantus perceived that she would have to help Wantus, so she got him to sit in a chair. Then she called all strong hands among the servants, and together they all carried big, corpulent Wantus T. out to his big bed. "Nighty night, sleep right," sang out Phantus G. without further ado.

"Oh, oh, oh," moaned Wantus.

"Don't you worry now," chortled Phantus back over her shoulder. "I'll tune in the news and see what I can get from my favorite analyst."

"Oh, oh, oh," moaned Wantus.

So Phantus G. nibbled her diet

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food and tuned in the news until very late at night in her own private bedroom with the wall viewers.

Next morning Wantus T. awoke early, at his usual prompt hour, as he had been accustomed to doing for many, many years, come hell, stock market wrecks or high back taxes. He had his usual six-course breakfast in bed, never saw Phantus (she was exhausted, poor soul, from all that news, and not strong from her diet either) and then had himself driven to the office by limousine, not feeling quite secure enough to go by air today. In his office he found all serene, as he thought it would not be. He glanced at the morning news-brief and there wasn't a word about the bombing! Then for perhaps the first time in all his long, long career Wantus T. half mistrusted himself. Had he dreamed it, that strange bird's flying? Was he really going a little crazy lately? But no! there it was! now, right there! wherever he looked, across his papers, up and down the reports, between him and the underlings when he glared, the afterimage, many, many times smaller, of that weird, birdlike figure he had seen on the moon. Was he going nuts?

Later that same morning Wantus T. closeted himself with one of his most savage competitors, "Clutchy" P. Takit of Amalgamated Sewer Pipes and other speculative gains. Through the expensive smoke of big cigars Wantus T. glared and "Clutchy" P. glared back. But down the glare of Wantus T., across the smoke pall, like a strange bird homing, like a new missile bomber, flew that pot-bellied uneven wedge, on toward "Clutchy" P. At last Wantus T. broke in the glare and he shrieked in desperation, "Did they bomb New York City last night?"

"Clutchy" P. perceived that he had a cracking man on his hands. It was a situation fondly to be dreamed for. The crack-up of Wantus T. would be new financial cream for "Clutchy" P. "They bombed Manhattan to the ground last night," said "Clutchy" P. "And I suspect that's not all."

"I knew it," raved Wantus, "I knew it. I saw the bird go down there!" "Clutchy" raised a brow.

"You saw what?" asked "Clutchy."

"I saw it," said Wantus, "I saw it—a strange, uneven-winged, V-shaped object floating down the night sky to the lights of New York City. The thing had a big, lumpy, roundish something that seemed suspended just where the arms of the V met. That, I guess, was the body, the belly full of bombs. And I guess, coming in from the moon as it did, it escaped our radar detection and other warning devices. Oh, God . . ." And Wantus T. used both his hands to grasp his skull and shake his head as though it were a melon, before he spoke again. "But the worst is," he continued, "I've been seeing that bird all day today, just as I saw it last night, but a much smaller version, of course. I even see it now, between you and me. —I guess I see only the after-image of it, a horrible thing branded on my eyes, but I see it! Do you see it!? Am I going crazy?"

"Clutchy" P. glanced up in alarm from some of Wantus T.'s financial jottings he had been scrounging a hard peek at. Then a strange, wild look came into the eyes of "Clutchy" P. There across the cigar smoke he too saw it! "No," he cried, "no, you're not going crazy. I—I see the image too! Just as you've described it. I see it! Only the bird I see has a big clot of a belly on top of the place where the wedge forms." Then he ran out of that closeted place, and the look of fear that was on him we must pardon.

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LATER THAT SAME WEEK one of "New York's finest" on a quiet beat in a far outlying part of the metropolis was surprised to see so many men well known in financial circles and government standing along a street, watching the night sky, looking at the moon. *"What is this?"* asked the policeman in a bluster-tone. He was duly enlightened by a fearful citizen that it was a new organization, just formed, and this was the first official meeting of Wantus T. Gainal's and "Clutchy" P. Takit's MOON-BIRD SKY-WATCHERS SOCIETY. To be a member a person had to be not only a tycoon and/or a big government man, but he had to be able to see a moon-bird as well. *"Something's very sick in this world!"* the fearful citizen added in afterthought, as he huddled himself deeper into his collar before he slunk away. The policeman did not loiter to debate the point, but betook himself away also.

After the new society had met for a few weeks, and each member had watched his own peculiar type of the moon-bird slide and wing-slip across the nocturnal skies, reconnoitering toward the heart of New York City, a thing happened that brought an end to the promising, fledgling organization. An obscure member broke his glasses one day, in some routine-type secretary-chase-type accident around his office, and had to be fitted for new lenses. In the course of the eye examination the optometrist discovered that the right eye of the man had a curious S-shaped scum across it, and the left eye had a bloody blot, or clot, near the center, with bars through it. "Have you been seeing very strangely lately?" asked the optometrist. *"Yes! Oh,* I have been seeing *very very* strangely lately," replied the man with sick eyes.

Well, naturally word flew around. And at odd moments, when they could safely trust business and/or government to subordinates, other members of the Society raced off to have eye tests. And sure enough, *yes*! strain, struggle for gain, long years of looking at financial reports, statements, columns of figures, ticker tape and $$$ had done it. Almost to a man the kings of business and government needed new glasses!

Later, one night about fourteen minutes past ten, Wantus T. Gainal was heard to remark to his wife Phantus G., "You know, I feared there was something really wrong. Funny how it was so simple. Harrumph. Just a little eyestrain right behind our own glasses, and we thought it was the end of the world. Ha." Phantus G. Gainal was heard to reply, *"Yes!"* Then she was heard to say, as she finished a diet wafer and turned to go, "I think I'll go tune in the news now with my favorite analyst and see what I can get."

And that just happened to be the night . . . under a faint moon . . . in a dirty sky . . . that the big . . . death bombs . . .

—DAVID R. BUNCH

ON SALE IN JANUARY AMAZING STORIES
(ALL STORIES NEW & COMPLETE)
THE BIG All-STAR ISSUE FEATURING
JACK WILLIAMSON'S OUTSTANDING NEW SHORT NOVEL,
THE DARK DESTROYER.

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L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers

THE ARCHITECT OF CAMELOT

ACCORDING to the sixth-century Breton priest Gildas, when in the previous century the Saxons invaded post-Roman Britain, the Britons

. . . took arms under the conduct of Ambrosius Aurelianus, a modest man, who of all the Roman nation was then in the confusion of this troubled period by chance left alive. . . .

After this, sometimes our countrymen, sometimes the enemy, won the field, to the end that our Lord might in this land try after his accustomed manner these his Israelites, whether they loved him or not, until the year of the siege of Badon Hill, when took place also the last almost, though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes. . . .

About the year 800, Nennius wrote a *History of the Britons*, drawing on Gildas and introducing mythical elements. After a garbled expansion of Gildas's account of Ambrosius, Nennius adds: "Then it was that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons. And though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander, and was as often conqueror." Nennius lists twelve battles, of which: "The twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon. In this engagement, 940 fell by his hand alone. . . ."[1]

This is the oldest known mention of Arthur, about 300 years after Arthur is supposed to have died. These passages from Gildas and Nennius are almost the sole historical basis for the Arthurian legend cycle, which became medieval England's *Iliad*.

Three hundred and fifty years later, a Welsh monk, a Geoffrey of Monmouth, took as sources Nennius and others, such as the churchly historian Baeda or Bede, the *Welsh Annals*, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Using Virgil's *Aeneid* as his model, Geoffrey constructed a largely fictional *History of the Kings of Britain*. This work enlarged the rôle of Arthur still further; in fact, nearly all the latter half of the book is devoted to the Pendragon family of Ambrosius, Uther, and Arthur. The book ends when, soon after Arthur's death, the Britons are finally driven back into Wales and Cornwall by the Saxons.

Then the romancers took over, adding magic, miracles, monsters, quests, love affairs, and other elements of medieval romance. If Arthur existed, he would never have known himself.

They are still at it. Between 1857 and 1885, Tennyson, in his *Idylls of the King*, made Arthur into a proper

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Victorian gentleman, about as much like a real Dark Age monarch as the Rev. Billy Graham resembles Attila the Hun. In 1889, Mark Twain burlesqued chivalric romance and damned the Middle Ages with *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court.*

In the last half-century, many novels have appeared on the Arthurian theme. They range from the realistic (Duggan, Sutcliffe, Treece), which try to reconstruct actual conditions in post-Roman Britain, to those (Stewart, Erskine, White) that more or less accept the assumptions of Arthurian romancers.

Among modern Arthurian novels, at the romantic end of the spectrum stands the great tetralogy, *The Once and Future King,* by T. H. White. Published at intervals from 1939 to 1958, the combined work can (like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*) be considered either a single long novel in several parts or as separate novels forming a chain of sequels. Of the modern Arthurian tales, White's tetralogy is currently the best-known to Americans as a result of becoming a successful musical comedy, *Camelot*, and subsequently a motion picture. (For some reason, the movie left out some of the operetta's most engaging songs.) John F. Kennedy's administration was sometimes compared to White's Camelot.

White's tetralogy is mainly based upon the *Morte d'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory. By the time Malory got to work on the story, the original theme of the struggle of the Britons against the invading Saxons had disappeared, which is a little like a life of George Washington that does not mention the American Revolution. Instead, there were countless, endless tales of parfit gentle knights rescuing maydenes faire from vile enchauntours and otherwise playing proper romantic rôles.

Malory even made Arthur an Englishman (that is, an Anglo-Saxon) instead of a leader of the Anglo-Saxon's mortal foes, the Celtic Britons. The romancers filled post-Roman Britain with knights, 600 years before knighthood became a regular institution, clattering around in Renaissance plate armor 800 years before such armor was invented.

Sir Thomas himself does not seem to have been quite a parfit gentle knight, since he spent much of his life in jail for assaulting and robbing his neighbors and raping their wives. In the 1460s, while doing time for one of these offenses, he lightened the tedium of prison by combining several French versions of the Arthurian story and translating the resulting conflation into English. In 1485, fourteen years after Sir Thomas's death, Caxton published the work.

White took Malory as his basis. Since, however, the milieu that Malory described never existed, the White novels can best be viewed as laid, not in this world, but in an imaginary parallel one. White hints that this is what he has in mind. His characters allude to the real kinds of England and other historical characters as legendary or mythical, and White assures us that his Arthur "was not a distressed Briton hopping about in a suit of woad in the fifth century."

White's scenery, customs, and costumes are, like Malory's, essentially those of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: the time of the Hundred Years' War, Joah of Arc, and the Wars of the Roses in real history. Edward III of England (1327-77, the victor of Crécy) has been suggested as the model for White's Arthur. The Nor-

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man Conquest is mentioned, Arthur being termed of Norman lineage. To enjoy these stories, the reader had better forget whatever he knows about medieval English history.

OF Terence Hanbury White (1906-64) it has been said, as of H. P. Lovecraft and Robert Howard, that he was "far more remarkable than anything he wrote."[2] Like Lovecraft, "Tim" White was a bundle of contradictions, which complicated his life. He was a sexual deviant; an intermittent alcoholic; a highly cultivated man who often displayed dreadful manners; a sensitive, sympathetic, tenderhearted man who tended to shout down the slightest disagreement; a celebrant of courage who passed the Hitlerian War safely in Ireland. In fits of childish rage, he sometimes quarreled with his best friends. He was afraid of many things, such as flying, but forced himself to do them. According to his biographer, "White, who was modest about his creative powers, was conceited about his intellect—which was second-rate."[3]

White had an effective way of coping with his problems. In *The Sword in the Stone,* Merlyn tells young Arthur:

"The best thing for being sad . . . is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder in your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then—to learn."[4]

Often sad, White took his own advice. He passionately pursued versatility, boasting:

. . . I can shoot with a bow and arrow, so when the next atomic bomb is dropped poor old White will be hopping about in a suit of skins shooting caribou or something with a bow and arrow. . . . I won a prize for flying aeroplanes about thirty years ago. I can plough with horses. I used to ride show jumpers; I have taught myself to be a falconer. One of the odder things I have done is to learn to go down in diving suits–the old brass hat diving suit. I have had to learn to sail. I swim fairly well. I was a good shot until I took to spectacles–clay pigeons and geese and things of that sort. Fishing. I was a very good fisherman. I used to drive fast cars–God knows why. I had to be good at games . . . . I had to teach myself not to be clumsy. Compensating for my sense of inferiority, my sense of danger, my sense of disaster, I had to learn to paint even, and not only to paint–oils, art, and all that sort of thing–but to build and mix concrete and to be a carpenter and to saw and screw and put in a nail without bending it. . . . I had to get first-class honours with distinction at the University. I had to be a scholar. I had to learn medieval Latin shorthand so as to translate bestiaries.[5]

Not everyone agreed that White was a master of all those skills. His longtime friend David Garnett, eminent author and critic, said that their friendship was based on a mutual misunderstanding. Garnett had an exaggerated idea of White's prowess at fishing and other sports, while White had an equally inflated notion of Garnett's scholarship and authorship. Garnett said: "I can testify that he was a rough and ready fisherman, and indifferent shot and up until 1946 a ludicrously incompetent carpenter."[6]

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Still, the man's gusto, energy, and drive for omnicompetence cannot fail to arouse admiration.

Like some other writers in this series, White had a bad start. His father was a police official in India; his mother, the daughter of another Anglo-Indian official. Constance White was another monster-mother: beautiful, vain, cold, demanding, jealous, and utterly selfish and self-absorbed. Hating sex, she refused it to her husband after young White's birth. The husband took to drink and became abusive. The boy saw them struggling for a pistol above his crib, each shouting that he was going to kill the other or himself or the child.

The mutually hating couple were eventually divorced. Years later, White got even with his mother by putting her into his Arthurian novels as Queen Morgause of Orkney, mother of Gawaine, Agravaine, Gaheris, Gareth, and—by Arthur, illegitimately—Mordred.

White went through English "public" (= private) schools, surviving a sadistic headmaster, and on to Cambridge. There he did well, living penuriously and tutoring to eke out his costs.

Falling ill in his third year, White took a year off for a sojourn in Italy, where he became fluent in Italian. He also fell in with homosexuals and became a practicing homosexual. As I think most psychiatrists would agree, his family background was of just the sort to predispose him in this direction.

He was not happy about his peculiarity, fervently wishing he were normal. He wrote: "I want to get married too, and escape from all this piddling homosexuality and fear and unreality."[7]

A few years after he graduated from Cambridge (with distinction, in 1929) he had himself psychoanalyzed to cure the deviation. The treatments seem to have been only partly successful. In later years, White carried his love for his dogs to extravagant extremes and was badly broken up when, one by one, they died. In 1946, in Yorkshire, he became engaged to a local girl about half his age. She gave him the air, and again he was heartbroken. According to the exhuberantly normal Garnett, White late in life explained:

. . . that he was a sadist. I am so little attracted by this perversion that I had never used my imagination to realize the unhappiness which inevitably attends it. Tim explained that the sadist cannot be happy unless he has proven the love felt for him by acts of cruelty, which naturally are misinterpreted by normal human beings. It had been Tim's fate to destroy every passionate love he had inspired. He had found himself always in the dilemma of either being sincere and cruel, or false and unnatural. Whichever line he followed, he revolted the object of his love and disgusted himself.[8]

Altogether, a complicated man. For six years after leaving Cambridge, White earned his bread by teaching in preparatory schools. He is said to have been an excellent teacher. He was tall, big, and strikingly handsome, with prominent blue eyes. He wore an intermittent beard in a clean-shaven era, when such an ornament was a virtual monopoly of the artist class.

He rode in fox hunts and wrote some contemporary novels, which had very modest but still encouraging sales. Not at all mechanically inclined, he drove an old black Bentley. Once, driving at night with a few whiskeys

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aboard, he drove it through the wall of a house and into the bedroom, to the understandable dismay of the occupants. He professed the Communist sympathies then fashionable among young intellectuals, although his real political orientation was towards a medievalistic, agrarian socialism of William Morris's kind.

In 1936, White quit teaching for full-time writing. His total output was twenty-four books (both fiction and non-fiction), thirteen short stories, minor publications, and unpublished or unfinished works. For several years he suffered the financial ups and downs of the free-lance writer, with a few ups and many downs. In 1938, he was living on credit when the success of *The Sword in the Stone*, a Book of the Month and the subject of a Disney animated cartoon feature, gave him a financial cushion.

In 1939, White settled in Ireland. There he stayed through the Second World War, writing, practicing falconry, and often drinking heavily. Visiting the Dunsanys and Dunsany Castle, he thought Lord Dunsany "a decent, amusing, interested, selfish, vain, enlightened fellow," but "not a patch on his wife, who remarked in a tone of acute nostalgia, à propos of a Daimler which they had once owned: 'Ah, that was a splendid car. It was simply riddled with bullets.' "[9]

White wrestled with his conscience about the war. A pacifistic patriot, he was over age for conscription, while weakness of eyesight and a brush with tuberculosis disqualified him for active service. He made desultory efforts to get a war job, for instance as a ferry pilot in the RAF Volunteer Reserve. But nothing came of this, and White ended the war in Ireland.

Of the Arthurian novels, the second volume, *The Witch in the Wood*, came out in 1939 and the third, *The Ill-Made Knight*, in 1940. The fourth section, *The Candle in the Wind*, was never published as a separate volume. Instead, White went back, revised the first three volumes, and added the fourth story as the final book of a single big four-deck volume, *The Once and Future King* (1958). In this omnibus volume, he changed the title of *The Witch in the Wood* to *The Queen of Air and Darknesses*. White planned and wrote a fifth story, *The Book of Merlyn*. But his inspiration failed; the work turned out badly and has never been published.

In the long interval between the first three novels and the omnibus volume, White kept busy at other projects. One was a fable, *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*, which transplanted the myth of Noah and the Flood to an Irish locale. White poked mild fun at the Irish, especially his landlord and landlady (thinly disguised), and at the Catholic Church. His former hosts were deeply offended when they found out.

More successful was an imaginative novel, *Mistress Masham's Repose* (1946), which became an American Book of the Month. This is an adventure-comedy on the borders of fantasy and science fiction. A ten-year-old orphaned heiress, Maria, is brought up in a crumbling mansion by a wicked governess and a wicked vicar, who plot to rob her of her inheritance. Maria discovers, on the overgrown estate, a colony of six-inch Liliputians. These were kidnapped from their native Liliput in Captain Lemuel Gulliver's time and brought as freaks to England, where they escaped and set up a secret settlement. Although the tale drags a bit in places, it is on the whole excellent of its kind.

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The Sword in the Stone tells of Arthur's boyhood from the time when Merlyn is hired as his tutor to the day when Arthur pulls out the sword and is thus proved the rightful king. Arthur, called "the Wart," is living at Sir Ector's castle, his older companion being Ector's son Kay. White makes Kay a natural leader and Arthur a natural follower. In Mary Stewart's recent Arthurian novel, *The Hollow Hills*, it is just the opposite: Arthur being the natural leader and Kay the follower.

Merlyn explains that he is a time traveler who has come back from the future to rear Arthur. The aged, all-knowing, all-wise white wizard is pretty much a fixture in stories of this kind, whether he be called Merlyn, Gandalf, Meliboë, or Vandermast. Their common prototype is the Merlin of Geoffrey and Malory, who may in his turn have a prototype in the Nestor of the *Iliad*.

As White's Merlyn explains to the Wart, living backwards is confusing. This assumption, however, lets White indulge in what Fritz Leiber has called "controlled anarchronism"; that is, dropping allusions to psychoanalysis and other modern things for laughs. Since the story is laid in an imaginary "secondary world" anyway, the question of straining the reader's credulity does not arise. At the same time, the reader of White learns a tremendous lot about real medieval usages and techniques.

Mark Twain did the same in *A Connecticut Yankee*, furnishing his hero's partisans with bicycles and revolvers. When *A Connecticut Yankee* was first made into a movie with Will Rogers, the bicycles had evolved into motorcycles. The second time around, the motorcycles became compact cars. Trust Hollywood.

White also models his supporting characters on human types from later periods. Sir Ector is a bluff, huntin' Victorian squire, while Morgan le Fay is a *Vogue* model. (Blame me not for using a masculine article with a feminine name; that is Malory's French.) Sir Palomedes, the Saracen knight, is a Bengali babu, modeled on Kipling's Hurree Chunder Mookerjee. Robin Hood, usually placed around 1200, appears.

To widen Arthur's consciousness, Merlyn turns him into nonhuman creatures, such as a fish and a hawk. The story is great fun; at times it becomes hilarious, as in the joust:

Slowly and majestically, the ponderous horses lumbered into a walk. The spears, which had been pointing in the air, bowed down to a horizontal line and pointed at each other. King Pellinore and Sir Grummore could be seen to be thumping their horses' sides with their heels for all they were worth, and in a few minutes the splendid animals had shambled into an earth-shaking imitation of a trot. Clank, rumble, thumpity-thump, and now the two knights were flapping their elbows and legs in unison, showing a good deal of daylight at their seats. There was a change in tempo, and Sir Grummore's horse could be definitely seen to be cantering. In another minute King Pellinore's was doing so too. It was a terrible spectacle. . . .

With a blood-curdling thumping of iron hoofs the mighty equestrians came together. Their spears wavered for a moment within a few inches of each other's helms—each had chosen the difficult point-stroke—and then they were galloping off in opposite directions. Sir Grummore drove his spear deep into the beech tree where they were sitting and stopped dead.

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King Pellinore, who had been run away with, vanished altogether behind his back. . . .

"Hi, Pellinore, hi!" shouted Sir Grummore. "Come back, my dear fellah, I'm over here."[10]

The Witch in the Wood = *The Queen of Air and Darkness* is only half the length of *The Sword in the Stone*. While it covers Arthur's young manhood, most of the story tells of Queen Morgause of Orkney and her brood. It ends with her seduction of Arthur. It also recounts King Pellinore's pursuit of the Questing Beast and his romance with the daughter of the Queen of Flanders.

Chapters alternate, in John Carter-Deja Thoris fashion, between Arthur's court and Orkney. Although the novel does not come up to its predecessor, it has good scenes. For instance, when Queen Morgause's sons are talking with the bibulous Irish priest, Saint Toirdealbhach, one mentions a story of interest to fans of Robert Howard:

"Or the one," said Gawaine, "about the great Conan who was enchanted to a chair. He was stuck to it, whatever, and they could not get him off. So they pulled him from it by force, and then there was a necessity on them to graft a piece of skin on his bottom—but it was sheepskin, and from thenceforth the stockings worn by the Fianna were made from the wool which grew on Conan!"[11]

Some blame the decline in quality on White's obsession with his mother, who appears as Morgause:

The queen picked up the cat. She was trying a well-known piseog to amuse herself, or at any rate to pass the time while the men were away at the war. It was a method of becoming invisible. She was not a serious witch like her sister Morgan le Fay—for her head was too empty to take any great art seriously, even if it were the black one. She was doing it because the little magics ran in her blood—as they did with all the women of her race.

In the boiling water, the cat gave some horrible convulsions and a dreadful cry. . . .[12]

The Ill-Made Knight, about the same length as *The Sword in the Stone*, concerns Lancelot and the triangle with Arthur and Guenever. (This is Malory's and White's spelling, but it has many other forms, such as Jennifer and Vanora.) White treats the story sympathetically; he is thought to have put a good deal of himself into Lancelot. The ill-made knight, being ugly, feels that he must excel in other achievements to make up. White shrewdly philosophizes:

There is a thing called knowledge of the world, which people do not have until they are middle-aged. It is something which cannot be taught to younger people, because it is not logical and does not obey laws which are constant. It has no rules.[12]

Finally, the short *Candle in the Wind* tells of the revenge of the Orkney brothers, led by Mordred, on Arthur and his court. At the end, the aging Arthur, the night before the final battle of Camlan, calls in a page named Tom and tells him his story. We are given to understand that this Tom grows up to be Malory.

There is much of White's philosophizing, some of it appealing; but, as his biographer said, his intellect was secondrate. Although his father was half Irish and his mother more than half Scotch, he gave the back of his hand to the Celts:

They were the race, now represented by the Irish Republican Army rather than by the Scots

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Nationalists, who had always murdered landlords and blamed them for being murdered—the race which could make a national hero of a man like Lynchahaun, because he bit off a woman's nose and she a Gall—the race which had been expelled by the volcano of history into the far quarters of the globe, where, with a venomous sense of grievance and inferiority, they could nowadays proclaim their ancient megalomania.[14]

There are reasons why the Celtic peoples, boasting such impetuous, warlike valor, nevertheless succumbed to the Romans in Gaul, the Saxons in England, and the Normans in Ireland. But those reasons would take us into anthropology and sociology, which were not White's métier. White also presented the most idealized Middle Ages ever: "It was the age of fullness, the age of wading into everything up to the neck," with plenty to eat, fine craftsmanship in castle and cathedral, priestly savants, scientists like Pope Silvester II, and all the other ornaments of refined civilization.

White was not just being naïve. This imagined Middle Ages, he says, is that which followed Arthur's pacifications. White knew the darker side of the age, portrayed in the description of conditions before Arthur:

. . . then you would have met the mendicants by the roadside, mutilated men who carried their right hands in their left. . . . In the baron's castle, in the early days, you would have found the poor men being disembowelled—and their living bowels burned before them—men being slit open to see if they had swallowed their gold, men gagged with notched iron bits, men hanging upside down with their heads in smoke, others in snake pits or with leather tourniquets round their heads, or crammed into stone-filled boxes which would break their bones . . . . Legendary kings like John had been accustomed to hang twenty-eight hostages before dinner . . . or, like Louis, had decapitated their enemies on scaffolds under the blood of which the children of the enemy had been forced to stand. . . . There had been roasting heretics on one hand—forty-five Templars had been burned in one day—and the heads of captives being thrown into besieged castles from catapults on the other.[15]

Mark Twain, in his bitterly anti-medieval *Connecticut Yankee*, would have agreed with this picture of the Middle Ages. Twain condoned the Terror of the French Revolution on the ground that it was only a fair revenge by the lower orders on the aristocracy for all the oppressions of the latter.

This is ridiculous, since the several thousand who lost their heads in 1794 had had nothing to do with oppressing medieval peasants. Ancient wrongs can never be righted, because both perpetrators and victims are long since dead, and nothing one does to or for their descendants affects them.

If one hunts, one can find examples a-plenty of both the imagined Arthurian and pre-Arthurian conditions in the real Middle Ages. Good and evil were inextricably mixed, as they are in all societies including ours.

At the end, White, in the person of Arthur, thinks about war and peace—not originally or profoundly, but with much common sense:

He remembered . . . where all those puffins, razorbills, guillemots and kittiwakes had lived together peacefully, preserving their own kinds of civilization without war—because they claimed no boundaries. He saw the problem before him as plain as a map.

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The fantastic thing about war was that it was fought about nothing—literally nothing. Frontiers were imaginary lines. There was no visible line between Scotland and England, although Flodden and Bannockburn had been fought about it.[16]

Ethologists specializing in the territorial instinct might not agree on the peacebleness of the puffins and so on; historians might take exception to the assertion that wars are fought about "nothing." For example, the American Civil War was fought about slavery, which is hardly "nothing." Still, White had a point.

In preparing his tetralogy for one-volume publication, White revised the first three novels—*The Sword in the Stone* the most drastically. No man to leave well enough alone, his changes were more for the worse than for the better.

The *The Sword in the Stone*, the Wart and Kay go hunting. When they kill a rabbit, the Wart shoots an arrow straight up to celebrate. A crow seizes the arrow and flies off with it. Kay says: "It was a witch." Searching for the arrow, they come upon a cottage with a brass plate:

MADAME MIM, B. A. (Dom-Daniel)
PIANOFORTE
NEEDLEWORK
NECROMANCY
No Hawkers, circulars
or Income Tax.
Beware of the Dragon.

Madame Mim, "a strikingly beautiful woman of about thirty, with coal-black hair," lures the boys in, imprisons them, and prepares to eat them, singing:

Two spoons of sherry
Three oz. of yeast,
Half a pound of unicorn,
And God bless the feast.
Shake them in a collander,
Bang them to a chop,
Simmer slightly, snip up nicely,
Jump, Skip, hop.

Merlyn rescues the boys and fights a duel with Madame Mim, with Hecate as referee. The duel consists of each duellist's turning himself into something, each trying to top the other's transformation in order to destroy the other. If one becomes a mouse, the other turns into a cat, and the first into a dog, and so on. When Merlyn becomes an elephant, Madame Mim assumes the form of an aullay, "as much bigger than an elephant as an elephant is larger than a sheep. It was a sort of horse with an elephant's trunk."[17] (A *Baluchitherium*?) Then Merlyn turns himself into a swarm of deadly bacteria, wherefrom the aullay dies.

Whether because he deemed the episode too juvenile, or because he did not think he should have two evil enchantresses in one story, White cut out the whole episode after Kay's remark: "It was a witch." That leaves the crow's theft of the arrow unexplained.

Later, the boys go with Robin Hood and his band to rescue some captives of Morgan le Fay. Morgan's castle "hand neon-lights around the front door, which said in large letters: THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS, NOW SHOWING." If the Wart and Kay eat anything in the castle, they will become prisoners, too. The interior is a gourmand's dream:

The fourth floor . . . was all shining white and silver, and the floor was of ivory. At the other end of the room was a huge chromium bar, covered with tinkling crystal taps, out of which poured incessant streams of whipped cream, fruit juice, boiling chocolate, and ice. Every possible kind of ice-cream sundae was con-

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veyed along the top of this bar, together with plates of cream buns, éclairs, and pâtisseries belges. Behind the bar, twenty charming negro minstrels were singing soulfully:

Way down inside the large intestine,
Far, far away,
That's where the ice cream cones are resting,
That's where the éclairs stay.

Queen Morgan is

. . . a very beautiful lady, wearing beach pajamas and smoked glasses, and she was smoking a cigarette in a long green jade holder as she lay full length on a white leather sofa. All round the walls and on the grand piano there were photographs, signed "Darling Morgy from Oberon," "Best Wishes, Pendragon R. I.," . . . or "Love from all at Windsor Castle."[18]

The rescue is duly accomplished. In the revision, however, White substituted a much less delightfully imaginative version. The castle is made entirely of food, and Morgan is "a fat, dowdy, middle-aged woman with black hair and a slight moustache."

White made further changes in Chapters 13, 18, and 19. In the original, Merlyn changes the Wart to a snake; in the revision, to an ant. The motto of the anthill is: EVERYTHING NOT FORBIDDEN IS COMPULSORY. While competently done, the ant episode seems dated, since it is an obvious takeoff on the Nazi government. This regime, naturally, was in the minds of millions when White wrote; but now it has been done to death.

Later, in the first version, the Wart visits Athene with Archimedes, Merlyn's pet owl. He is captured by and rescued from the giant Galapas. White cut out these episodes and substituted a sojourn by the Wart in the form of a wild goose. The goose episode is one of the White's best and should not be missed; but neither should the parts deleted to make room for it.

Perhaps the best way to read the tetralogy is first to read the original version of *The Sword in the Stone*. Interrupt it at the end of Chapter 18 to read Chapters 19 and 20 of the revision. Then go on with the rest of the older version; then read the rest of *The Once and Future King*.

AFTER THE WAR, White returned to England, where Garnett lent him a cottage he owned in Yorkshire. Here White led a solitary life except for his abortive engagement and occasional visits from friends. With the friends, however, he sometimes went into fits of ungovernable rage. He blamed these outbursts on having fallen downstairs on his head in Ireland while drunk.

The success of *Mistress Masham's Repose* made White prosperous, and *Camelot* made him rich. To avoid the murderous British income tax, he moved to the Channel Islands and bought a house on Alderney. There he had a brief but hot heterosexual love affair. He abandoned *The Book of Merlyn* as hopeless. He did volunteer work for the deaf and the blind. He sailed, wrestled with his alcoholism, finished revision on *The Once and Future King*, and tried but failed to write a novel about Tristram.

In his last years, White's wandering libido settled on a boy. For four years he struggled with this obsession, not wishing to pervert the lad but unable to tear himself loose: "a small boy—whom I don't need sexually, whose personality I disapprove of intellectually, but to whom I am committed

(cont. on page 124)

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fantasy books

Reviewed by Fritz Leiber

THE WATCHERS OUT OF TIME by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth, Arkham House, 1974, $8.50, 400 pages

AMERICAN GOTHIC by Robert Bloch, Simon and Schuster, 1974, 6.95, 222 pages

READER'S GUIDE TO THE CTHULHU MYTHOS by R. E. Weinberg and E. P. Baglund, Silver Scarab Press, Albuquerque, N. M., 87106, 88 pages

In my last several columns I discussed the Cthulhu Mythos invented by H. P. Lovecraft and the development of the supernatural horror story over the past fifty years. Now the publication of an extensive bibliography of Mythos stories and articles and also of an Arkham omnibus of all the stories August Derleth wrote taking off from very brief notes left by Lovecraft allows me to add to that discussion in an important area.

In 1936 the magazine *Weird Tales* was still flourishing. True, Robert E. Howard had just died and Clark Ashton Smith had slacked off his contributions, but Mythos stories were appearing by young admirers of Lovecraft such as Robert Bloch and Frank Belknap Long and by editorial clients of Lovecraft such as Hazel Heald and William Lumley. The most important of these tales was Bloch's *The Shambler from the Stars*, since it stimulated Lovecraft to write his *Haunter of the Dark*.

More significantly, in 1936 the leading science-fiction magazine *Astounding Stories* published Lovecraft's short novels *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Shadow Out of Time*. They were considered to be science fiction—and rightly so, to my mind, since their theme was the limitless strangeness of the Copernican Cosmos and the lonely and precarious situation of mankind in it. And as late as 1945, when Viking issued its *Portable Novels of Science*, ably edited by Donald A. Wollheim, *The Shadow Out of Time* was included.

Then in 1937 Lovecraft died and soon afterwards John W. Campbell, Jr., became editor of *Astounding Stories*, where what we think of as the modern era in science fiction (Heinlein, Asimov, Van Vogt, de Camp, Sturgeon, etc.) had its beginnings, with a sharpening of ideational texture and a gradual improvement of literary quality.

Meanwhile August Derleth began publishing his own Cthulhu Mythos stories, first in *Weird Tales*, later under the imprint of his own Arkham House.

The critical divorcement of science fiction from all "Lovecraftian" stories had begun. It reached its heights in the 1950's and early 1960's when

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many of the sharpest critical minds in the field (Judith Merril, Damon Knight, Avram Davidson, etc.) appeared to consider Lovecraft (especially as promoted by Derleth) as the antithesis of all that was good and sound in imaginative fiction. This (largely false) divorcement was exacerbated rather than ameliorated when Derleth, a skilled regional and nature writer (his *Walden West* is great), but no worshipper of science nor lover of modern technology, began with prodigious energy to edit numerous anthologies both of supernatural horror stories and of science fiction.

The Weinberg/Berglund *Reader's Guide* shows us that during the 1940s and 1950s Derleth was writing almost all of the new Mythos stories, signing some with his own name and Lovecraft's (though the latter's contribution was seldom more than a single sentence) and some with his own name alone. The latter best exemplify what Derleth did to the Cthulhu Mythos. Most of them are contained in two Arkham House books (later issued in paperback by Ballantine): *The Mask of Cthulhu*, 1958 and *The Trail of Cthulhu*, 1962

Derleth divided the supernatural entities of the Mythos into the good guys (the Elder Gods) and the bad guys (Cthulhu and all the rest) and gave them fixed dwellings under the earth and seas and among the stars—near Betelgeuse and in the Pleiades and Hyades. (This despite Lovecraft's atheistic and materialistic outlook). He persistently tried to organize them all into a neat fictional world, despite the fact that it is never the neatly organized which fills us with terror, but rather the unknown or the nearly unknown.

In the Derleth world weird fliers from *The Mountains of Madness* endlessly whistle "Tekeli-li!" from the high air, hordes of batrachian folk from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* hop and flop about, Great Cthulhu treads ponderously and squishily far underground, night gaunts from *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* carry highminded heroes who have sipped the golden mead of the Elder Gods on transatlantic flights from Arkham to a foggy Sherlock-Holmesian London. All is repetition: In Lovecraft's original, *The Call of Cthulhu*, the monster reforms from his disordered atoms after having a small steamship driven through him; in *The Trail of Cthulhu* he does exactly the same thing after having been blown up by high explosives and ultimately by an atomic bomb. Quite like the filmic revivals of Frankenstein's monster.

Lovecraft stressed the importance of novelty and surprise in the supernatural horror story. Derleth viewed it as a pastiche form where novelty and topical references are suspect and where traditional horrors rise from the past and are duly exorcised. He manipulated the Lovecraft materials as if they were a deck of well-worn cards. There is usually the wise and good old man battling the forces of evil; in *The Trail of Cthulhu* he is Dr. Laban Shrewsbury, prototype of Brian Lumley's Titus Crow. And he is equipped with all sorts of weapons against the supernatural—in particular, some very efficacious five-pointed soapstone stars guaranteed to stop most Mythos villains dead in their tracks ("cosmic Band-Aid," Prof. John Taylor has aptly called them). By contrast Lovecraft gave his heroes no special defenses at all in his last tales: *The Haunter of the Dark* and the two short science-fictional novels from *As-*

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tounding Stories.

Derleth was an accomplished writer and created several readable, slow-paced Mythos melodramas, but nowhere did he achieve the nightmare intensity, the drumming on a single theme of menace, the sense of cosmic strangeness and wonder, that Lovecraft did in his best stories.

Most, thought not all, of the stories in *The Watchers Out of Time* are Mythos tales. They comprise the Arkham novel *The Lurker at the Threshold*, 1945, all the tales from *The Survivor and Others*, 1957, and stories published scatteredly since then in anthologies of originals and Lovecraft associational books such as *The Shuttered Room and Other Pieces*, Arkham 1959.

By fortunate circumstances the title story in *The Watchers Out of Time*, promised for many years but in the end never finished except for the first 10,000 words, begins in Derleth's happiest vein: an ancient house described with loving care, some interesting genealogical research, and some fine nature descriptions, especially of the stars which Derleth knew so well as an habitually night-wandering countryman. One wonders what Mythos author will eventually finish this sizable fragment as Derleth did almost every surviving scrap of Lovecraft. Goodness knows, there are enough such writers. The Weinberg/Berglund *Guide* shows a steadily growing number in the 1960s and 1970s—34 new Chulhoid stories published in 1971 and 26 in 1972!

The *Guide* is surely a labor of love, intended to list all Mythos stories and articles written without exception. I noticed a couple of omissions, as of the Arkham book *Something About Cats*, 1949, edited by Derleth and devoted to Lovecraftian items, including my longish essay *A Literary Copernicus*, which analyzed the Mythos in considerable depth and detail. Also missing: *The Mechanistic-Supernatural of H. P. L.* by George Wetzel, from the U. of Detroit quarterly *Fresco*, Spring 1958. One questions the need to include *all* Robert E. Howard's Conan stories, apparently on the grounds that a couple of Sprague de Camp's posthumous ones contained Mythos references. Or the wisdom of including scores of unpublished and merely projected Cthulhu tales. (Crispin Burnham, for instance, is represented by three unpublished tales and no less than *seventeen* projected ones—where "projected" means no more than laying dubious claim to a title.) But even such works of supererogation demonstrate the enduring fascination of Lovecraft's bizarre creation.

In his youth Robert Bloch wrote many a mythos story. He was one of the youngest yet also chiefest of Lovecraft's correspondents—almost a protege. He then went on to produce a wealth of stories in many off-trail veins: the weird, many a *conte cruel* and Grand Guignol item, the weirdly and also the horrendously humorous, the satiric and sardonic, psychopathology, crime, detection, and science fiction. The best of these are very good indeed: "The Dream Makers," "Mr. Steinway," "The Light-House" (where Poe's style is beautifully recreated), "The Hell-Bound Train" (which won a Hugo), "Enoch," "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper" (that hardy perennial and model most recently duplicated in the first episode of the TV series "The Night Stalker"), "One Way to Mars," and "Slave of the Flames."

But Bloch's genius was dramatic. Back in the 1930s he was writing

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black comedy before it was publishable or otherwise exploitable. Then he began to write novels of crime and psychopathology, of which *The Scarf* and *The Dead Beat* are remarkable, but *Psycho* a truly chilling study of the anima and of lonely young men who among other things are deeply fascinated by stories (come to think of it!) of the Cthulhu sort—one of the few murder novels of our times with genuine surprises in it, as *New Yorker* was quick to point out. Hitchcock's really quite faithful film of it helped to bring Bloch to Hollywood, where he has written many TV shows and scripted such noteworthy films as *Straightjacket*, *Nightwalker*, *The House That Dripped Blood* (a quartet of his short stories), and *Asylum*.

It is the fate of the TV and film writer to have his new fiction neglected, but Bloch still manages to produce outstanding short stories such as "The Animal Fair" and "The Movie People," that poignant tale of film extras who live only in the surviving prints of the crowd scenes in which they appeared. Bloch not only likes to write film scripts, he likes (perhaps even better!) to write stories about the movie business—ever since, he says, he saw the horrendous visage of Lon Chaney in *The Phantom of the Opera* when he was a child. One of his most interesting novels (originally titled *Colossal* but ineptly merchandized as *The Star Stalker*, Pyramid 1968) is, surprisingly enough, a sort of pastoral hymning his praise of the early film epoch: "The silent movies *were* America, for that dazzling decade from 1919 to 1929 . . . Silence *is* golden, and the movies were our golden age."

And now the novel *American Gothic*, which would make an outstanding film except for the neglect aforementioned. It is a fictional study of the first Chicago world's fair—the Columbian Exposition of 1893—and of its stranger-than-fiction mass murderer Herman W. Mudgett, who called himself H. H. Holmes, a pseudonym later used by Anthony Boucher. Bloch modestly says of Mudgett, "If anything his private life-style was far more fantastic than this fictional account."

My, I'd like to see that film!—using all available material, no matter how fantastic, and scripted by Bloch.

Bloch, incidentally, will be guest of honor at the 1st World Fantasy Convention, to be held in Providence, Rhode Island, on Halloween weekend, October 31st—a most auspicious time and place indeed, considering the ever-increasing interest in Lovecraft.

—FRITZ LEIBER

The following concluding paragraph was inadvertantly omitted from last issue's column by Fritz Leiber and is published here with our apologies to Fritz for its omission.–TW

These reproductions are only a few among the many which make the volume "a book collector's dream," according to Stuart Schiff, a good judge of such matters, who also points to the fact that Conover "went to the trouble and expense of color separations to reproduce the color of Lovecraft's ink!" (I reviewed the book largely in galleys.)

—FRITZ LEIBER

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right. *He* had esoteric knowledge. If *he* couldn't fix it—who could? (My next job is to track down the faulty control mechanism in the "main" refrigerator—which seems to malfunction most during periods of excessive humidity—and replace it. It will probably be more complicated than replacing a spring, but not impossibly so.)

I live in a not unprosperous part of the country. It's a common sight to see old appliances—worth, originally, hundreds of dollars, and still probably of some intrinsic value—thrown out, standing by the curb, waiting for a municiple pickup to take them to a dump. Washing machines, air-conditioners, refrigerators, stoves, diswashers, freezers—all have one thing in common: they stopped working properly and the owners were advised to throw them out and buy new ones. The advice most often came from a serviceman called in to make a repair. A man with esoteric knowledge. "It doesn't work" is about all the owner knows. The serviceman is supposed to *understand* the machine and know *why* it doesn't work. And he usually says something like, "This is an old machine; it's hard to get parts for one now. You'd be better off getting a new one." What he is confessing is that he doesn't want to figure out what's really at fault and fix it. Or, he wants so much money for the job that it becomes "cheaper" to buy a new one.

A friend of mine took his car to a diagnostic center. They told him it required several hundred dollars worth of work. He had a long trip coming up, for which he wanted his car to be in good shape. Instead of fixing the old one, he bought another. He was at the mercy of those people with the esoteric diagnostic machines and the mechanics with their esoteric knowledge. It was easier for him to spend more money.

That's objective reality for you.

We've so objectified our surroundings—and so surrounded ourselves with objects the workings of which we consider beyond our comprehension—that we are now in serious danger of losing our own realities. We are well down the road toward considering human beings as objects no different in basis from our man-made objects. Our work and behavior are systematized.

I had to take my daughter to the emergency room at Fairfax Hospital recently; she'd fallen and cut her chin to the bone. We arrived at the emergency room less than ten minutes after her fall. First we were directed to a desk where a woman typed out an elaborate form. Then we waited for more than half an hour—my daughter frightened and in pain—until a doctor was ready to see her. In ten minutes she was cleaned up, given six stitches, and sent out, feeling much better. "It must be busy tonight," I remarked to a nurse after our wait.

"No," she said, checking out the typed form and filling in other blanks. "Things are quiet tonight."

That half-hour wait was caused by the *routine* work of the emergency staff. (Fairfax Hospital is a modern, suburban hospital—one of the first in the country to use robots—and not one of your inner-city slaughterhouses. It is undoubtedly superior to most of the hospitals I saw in New York City.) The *system* by which this hospital functions takes precidence over the *basic function* of the hospital. Humans must order themselves to fit the system; the system does not allow for human uniqueness.

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As our technology grows ever more sophisticated it grows both less comprehensible to the average person, and more removed from his or her control. Ultimately the technology controls us—and we are helpless to resist it.

The second half of this century has witnessed the birth of a reaction to this technological dehumanizing process. That reaction is a retreat into fantasy.

It was not always so. In the early years of this century people were as often as not enthusiastic about the ongoing technological revolution. Inventors were culture-heroes. Henry Ford the first was all but deified for putting an easy-to-service automobile—the Model T—into the hands of many people for whom cars had been too great a luxury to consider. Technology was going to abolish human slavery—liberate us all.

Alas for all our expectations. Few realized where technology would lead us—nor the cost it would extract from us. We live today in a world in which we are uneasily beholden to technology—unwilling to live without it (in many cases *unable* to live without it), rendered helpless by our enslavement to it.

A fascinating book on this subject is the recent bestseller, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintainance*. The book is complex and I'm not about to reduce it to a simple paragraph here, but its author, Robert Pursig, has given much thought to the reconciliation of our technological society with our needs as whole human beings—the dichotomy which is probably the best symbol of the Twentieth Century. I recommend it without reservations to those of you who wish to pursue this larger subject.

What I want to consider is the way in which we have—instead of reaching this reconciliation—turned to fantasy as an escape from technological reality, and the implications of this move. But, because this topic requires more space than I have available here, I shall do so here next issue.

THE ISSUE AT HAND: Last issue, in a last-minute decision after the issue had been completely made up and was ready to print, we raised our cover price from 75¢ to $1.00 a copy. We had hoped to avoid this move, having raised our price from 60¢ only a year and a half earlier. However, economic realities made it necessary—and I do not think I need to tell you that the rate of inflation in our economy in the last year has been frightening. We held out as long as we could (the rest of the magazines in the field raised their prices six months or more earlier; two—*If* and *Vertex*—have ceased publication), but it was a delaying action at best.

It was too late to make any changes in either the October FANTASTIC or the November AMAZING, both of which had been assembled and set in type before this decision was made, but with this issue we are doing what we can to pass on to you some added value for your extra two bits. We could not increase the number of our pages, paper costs being what they are, but we have decreased the size of our type—going from 10-point type for the stories to 9-point type), which adds in equivilent wordage an extra two stories to this issue. This is a permanent change, and it means more fiction every issue.

We are also, for the time being, foregoing serials. Serials have always been controversial as a topic with stf

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magazine readers—few are apathetic on the subject and most of you are vociferously for or against them. In the past I've tried to alternate issues in which serials appeared with those in which all stories were complete. I've observed no trend in the sales figures of those issues—no indication that a serial either helped or hurt an issue's sales—and I'm not ruling out the possibility of a serial in a future issue, especially if I'm offered a novel too good to refuse, but for the time being we'll try it without a serial. I'm interested in your reactions, of course, but the real test is going to be sales—the results of which are not final until about six months after an issue has gone off sale.

—TED WHITE

The Architect of Camelot (cont. from page 117)

emotionally, against my will. The whole of my brain tells me the situation is impossible, while the whole of my heart hangs on." Then the child's father, taking alarm, removed his son from White's orbit.

Now fat and full-bearded, White was called "an extremist"; "always good fun"; "kind and generous"; "a warm and considerate host"; "overbearing"; "domineering"; one who "never admitted himself wrong"; and sometimes "a drunken bore," who dominated the conversation, roaring out the same jokes and stories time and again.[19] He hired a raffish Neapolitan family as feudal retainers.

In 1963, White went to the United States for a lecture tour. The tour was successful; but, on the way back by ship in 1964, he suddenly died of heart failure.

White was, much of the time, an unhappy man, and he sometimes made those around him unhappy, too. But the pleasure that he has given multitudes through his books makes up for it.

NOTES:

1. Gildas, 25f; Nennius, 50.
2. T. H. White: *The Once and Future King* (Berkley, 1966), p. 534; Sylvia Townsend Warner: *T. H. White* (Viking, 1968, p. 46.
3. Warner, p. 183.
4. White (1966), p. 183; T. H. White: *The Sword in the Stone* (Dell, 1962), p. 257. The wording differs slightly in the 1963 version.
5. Warner, p. 27.
6. David Garnett: *The White-Garnett Letters* (Viking, 1968), p. 7.
7. Garnett, p. 11.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
9. Warner, p. 141; Garnett, p. 71.
10. Fritz Leiber: "Controlled Anachronism," in *The Conan Swordbook* (Mirage, 1969), pp. 132-47; White (1966), p. 66.
11. White (1966), p. 239.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 518.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 532, 530.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 638.
17. White (1963), pp. 69, 80.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 152f.
19. Warner, pp. 288, 304ff, 317.

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

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Letters intended for publication should by typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.*

Dear Ted,

Lafferty's "Old Halloweens on the Guna Slopes" was very fine. His strange humor was just right for the story. His descriptions of very odd characters was so highly original that I was spellbound by the tale. Mary Mondo, the ghost, was an especially interesting product of Lafferty's imagination. The scene in Mr. Dumbarton's bedroom was very odd, but a great idea. Somehow Lafferty writes like this. But how!? I wonder if he ever trick-or-treated like the half-lovable, half-frightening kids' gang he describes?

"Death from the Sea" was ok, but the whole story got a little slippery. Imagine a story about the young Attila the Hun?! He lived up to history's verdict more violently in reality than even in this hack-and-stack episode. The deus ex machina ending was a little bit much also. I enjoyed the story as pure swordplay fun, but page after page of the same battle soon dulls. It reminds me in a curious way of "We All Died At Breakaway Station" where the alien menace just keeps on comin' no matter what the heroic sacrifice. It gets a bit thick.

Your editorial was an excellent commentary on your policy versus John Norman's with regard to sex in stories. Erotic realism is a good term to describe just the kind of legitimate uses sex can be put to in a well constructed and thoughtful story. I object to Norman's caricatures of sexuality on basically the same grounds that you do. Norman uses sex in a strangely repressive way which exhibits as much neurosis as it does strait-laced puritanism. It sounds like he would disdain sexual experiences which depend on mutual gratification and open honesty. He is afraid, I feel, of the vulnerability that goes with relating to another in a free sexual manner. Trust is the important dimension he attempts to shackle and chain through violent dominance. His fantasies are very childish in the type of illogic.

MidAmeriCon's policy of $50 at the door for late attending fans seems completely repugnant to me. Due to the poverty of recently graduated students such as myself, I feel this policy discriminates very unfairly against many fans. Of course, there are a lot of fans who do have the money, but they are more likely to join early because their financial stability makes it easier for them to make the long-range commitment to attend a con-

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vention still over a year away. Even if I paid the attending membership fee now, I could in no way be sure I'd even have enough money to eat during the con. Cons are now so huge and expensive that they've left guys like me in the dark. I've never been a legitimate guest of a hotel during a convention. The hassles of finding a place to sleep, something to eat, etc have made it very unrealistic for me to think of attending any conventions whatsoever. I finally got tired to this kind of worried existence at a con when I was supposed to be having a great time so I've basically given up the idea of going to any very soon.

David Taggart is something of a letterhack himself. He shouldn't wonder that we come and go as the rewards for such efforts are defined in terms of egoboo. Egoboo can lose its drawing power as the letterhack realizes the insubstantial quality of such rewards. Also, fans who can write a half-way coherent letter usually aspire to higher callings in fandom. Letterhacking seems to be a respected apprenticeship in fandom. However, it is really rarely an end in itself unless one's letters are masterpieces like Harry Warner's or other famous fans who have written letters voluminously.

DAVE HULVEY
Rt. 7, Box 68
Harrisonburg, Va. 22801

Dear Ted,

I was a little surprised at your Editorial in the Aug 75 issue, considering the words you wrote (if indeed you are the same Ted White) in Chap. 13 of *The Sorceress of Qar*, when I originally read the passage, I thought it a bit unnecessary; but what the hell. I do agree that Norman's works are a terrible bore; as to their being pornographic, I can't say because I gave up reading them after the third book. At any rate, I'm not sure I got your distinction between when fucking is fucking and when it is artistic achievement in literature (sword&sorcery down to S&M). I guess that I'm not prudish enough or something or maybe not enough into Women's Lib to be all that concerned what degradations are put on the cardboard characters that appear in literature. But if you don't want S&M in FANTASTIC, that's fine by me, I'd just as soon read about nefandous creatures being raped and gored as read about females getting it. Enough of that.

Another thing that I didn't quite understand was David Taggart's letter bemoaning the loss of the letterhacks of yesterday. I wonder what period Taggart has in mind for the "Golden Age" of letterhacks? I have only recently returned to reading the pulps of S&S and fantasy after an hiatus of 20 years and I find that the letter column contains more or less the same letterhacks of 20 years ago. Actually your column is a little better in that it only infrequently has one of those dreary letters that begin "Although I am only eight years old . . . etc." I enjoy the letters, it takes me back to my old fan days and it's nice to see that in this world of flux, some things don't change. It's a nice friendly column with a great deal of humaness about it. Sort of like the fanzines of yesteryear (and I suspect of this year).

Moorcock's "Count Brass" was only so-so for Moorcock; he seems perpetually unable to stop writing a series. I have read the four books of Dorian Hawkmoon's service to the Runestaff (service *for* the Runnestaff, *with* the Runestaff? whatever) and thought that it concluded nicely; but now we are in for several more books

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of Count Brass, should have known it was a ruse when he killed the old boy off. How long will it be before kindly old Prince Corum will make *his* resurrection? I find that this parallel dimensions business gets a bit hectic after a while. I'm not sure who started it first, I came across it in Zelazny's superb works on the fratricide in Amber where it was effective. Moorcock's use of it in the Runnestaff and Prince Corum schticks became very well written pieces from a linguistic point of view, but from a plot standpoint a bit too complicated and unnecessary. I also noticed the same thing in Poul Anderson's *A Midsummer Tempest,* where it seemed to be stuck in because Anderson is not quite sure he wants to totally leave the SF field and write pure fantasy (whatever pure fantasy is). I guess that what my complaint boils down to is that I see behind the overuse of parallel dimensions an attempt to explain magic "scientifically" and I'd just as soon have magic explained "magically" if you follow me.

I hope that FANTASTIC has a long and reasonably (even unreasonably) profitable life since with the demise (apparently) of the Ballantine fantasy series this is my only steady source.

GEORGE OSHRY
522 Cottonwood St.
Grand Forks, ND 58201

Frankly I'm nonplussed by your reference to Chapter Thirteen of The Sorceress of Qar*—which I just reread. It is in many ways the direct antithesis of what I was complaining about in Norman's book. When I wrote* Sorceress *I set out to write, among other things, a love story in which the erotic scenes were handled with both beauty and realism. Looking back on the book from the vantagepoint of nine years, I'm not overly impressed with it—it's neither my best nor my worst book—but I think the sex in it is honest. The chapter to which you refer is one in which the Sorceress of the title is raped by the bad guys, whose purpose is to destroy the love between her and the hero. The rape happens "offstage"—that is, it is recalled, in differing terms, from both her viewpoint and that of the hero (who was helpless-to interfere and unconscious for much of the time), but is not shown happening. What is presented instead is the Sorceress's reaction (she feels herself defiled) and the hero's reaction (distress for her, mixed with continued love for her). In contrast, Norman's hero is a rapist who believes that torture is appropriate for women and will lead them to sexual compliance, if not outright lust. In my book his hero would be a villain . . . As for the letterhacks of yesterday, the question would seem to be,* which *'yesterday'? Until the early-mid-fifties, letter-columns were common in the stf magazines, and often went on for ten or twenty pages of tiny type. With the death of the pulp-magazine format, letter columns mostly disappeared. When I reinaugurated the letter column here (in 1969) only our sister magazine,* AMAZING, *and* Analog *had letter columns of all the stf magazines then in publication. I'm glad you find this "a nice friendly column with a great deal of humaness about it"—that's what I had in mind.*–TW

Dear Mr. White:

I've just finished reading the August issue of FANTASTIC, and, after more than thirty years of reading your magazine and its predecessor, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, about all I can ask is. "What happened?"

Reading a story like "Old Hallow-

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eens on the Guna Slopes" gave me a headache. What's this fellow Lafferty trying to do? Be funny? Be serious? *I can't tell.* Malzberg's "Transfer"—well, I've come to expect this sort of thing from him: very serious, very bitter stuff. He must be a miserable person. I feel sorry for him. And "Death From The Sea"—I don't know who Harvey Schreiber is, but you can throw him back into the sea with my blessings. You say "Attila the Hun makes his first appearance in these pages" and I say that I hope it's his last as well. The story was poorly written and the resolution was a rabbit from the author's hat.

Only Joe Haldeman's "The Devil His Due" repaid my reading it—and it wasn't as sharply done as the original short story you published five years ago, from which he did the script. But Haldeman at least is a storyteller. The rest of these guys aren't—and it shows.

Well, to get back to my first question, "What happened?". It used to be that the prose in FANTASTIC (and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES before it) wasn't as polished, but the authors had *stories to tell.* You know: stories with beginnings, middles and ends—real plots. A guy would have a problem and he'd solve it. Those were really satisfying stories for me to read.

Now at this point you're probably shaking your head and saying to yourself, "This guy's got a case of nostalgia." And I thought maybe you'd be right, so I pulled out some old (1948 and 1949) issues of FA. Remember them? Raggedy pulp edges you couldn't thumb through and shedding dandruff all over your lap? Real colorful covers? Big, double-page illos—even a double-page contents page! Of course the paper's getting yellow and brittle now—mine are, anyway, but they've been up in the attic for twenty-five years—and I had to be careful turning the pages, but I read some of those issues, Ted, and even though I didn't remember the stories at all, and some of the writing was a bit crude by present-day standards, *I really enjoyed them.* Remember Charles Myers' "Toffee" stories? Rog Phillips? Chester S. Gier? Those guys were storytellers—and what stories they had to tell!

Well, sitting down and spending a couple of evenings reading those old pulp issues really inspired me, and I wrote a story of my own, "A Personal Demon," which, it seems to me, has a lot of the flavor of the stories I enjoyed. Now I know this whole letter sounds like a buildup to my trying to sell you this story, but that's not the point. The point is that I had to write this story in order to be able to read the kind of story I enjoy. Maybe it's a lousy story by your professional standards, but I'm enclosing it just so you can see what I'm talking about. Who knows—maybe you can get stories like these this from your present authors too, if they knew anyone wanted to read them.

Anyway, here's a quarter (keep it!) and a SASE, and my thanks for your time.

MICHAEL F. X. MILHAUS
Mason, Ohio, 45040

I get letters more or less like this one from time to time, in which would-be authors point out to me how much better their stories are than the stories we print. However Mr. Milhaus's story is the first to favorably impress me. It's not the greatest piece of fiction I've ever read, but it is what he claims it to be: refreshingly old-fashioned. You'll see it here soon, perhaps even next issue. —TW

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Dear Sir,

I wanted to write this letter in regard to the book review in the June issue, by Mr. Fritz Leiber, concerning Brian Lumley's *The Burrowers Beneath*. Though I have long enjoyed Mr. Leiber's works, I feel he harshly judged Mr. Lumley's work. I found *The Burrowers Beneath* fascinating. I have enjoyed Cthulhu mythos stories for a number of years, and I feel this book is one of the finest I have read. It explains the mythos in terms a reader can recognize, not depending merely on the supernatural. Mr. Lumley has explored the realm of the mythos more thoroughly than any writer has previously, trying to tie up loose ends and doing a magnificent job of it. In his latest novel, *The Transition of Titus Crow*, fantasy, horror, and science-fiction fans all have a treat waiting for them if they choose to read it. I consider the best novel I have read this year.

On I final note, let me say that I enjoy FANTASTIC very much, and I wish you much success in the future, though I would appreciate a mythos story every now and then.

Thank you for your time.

HARRIS LENTZ III
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The Purvess Incident (cont. from page 81)

HERE Sir Edmund's manuscript ends. As of the present, the remainder of this memoir has not been found.

NOTES

1. Sitting on the British throne at this time was Queen Anne, daughter of the exiled James II and the third monarch of England's first constitutional monarchy, having succeeded the joint reign of William III and Mary II. From Clevere's education at Oxford, as well as his literary tone, we can assume that he was a Royalist, a member of the group coming to be known in this era as the Tories.

2. Probably raccoon.

3. Clevere betrays his continental influence by this statement. In French, "premier étage" means the flight above the ground floor.

4. It has been suggested that this means "Fellow, London Brotherhood of the Sciences.' As I have been unable to confirm the existance of a scientific fraternity in 18th Century London with this title, I am inclined to agree with Prof. Shick that it means, in fact, "Fanatical Lover of Boudoir Society."

5. Clevere shows that he is indeed well educated, since physics was rarely included in the education of a gentleman in his day. Sir Isaac Newton lived from 1642 to 1727, and although it seems that he and Caspar Finch were acquainted with each other, there is no evidence that the great physicist and Sir Edmund ever met.

—JAMES LINCOLN WARREN

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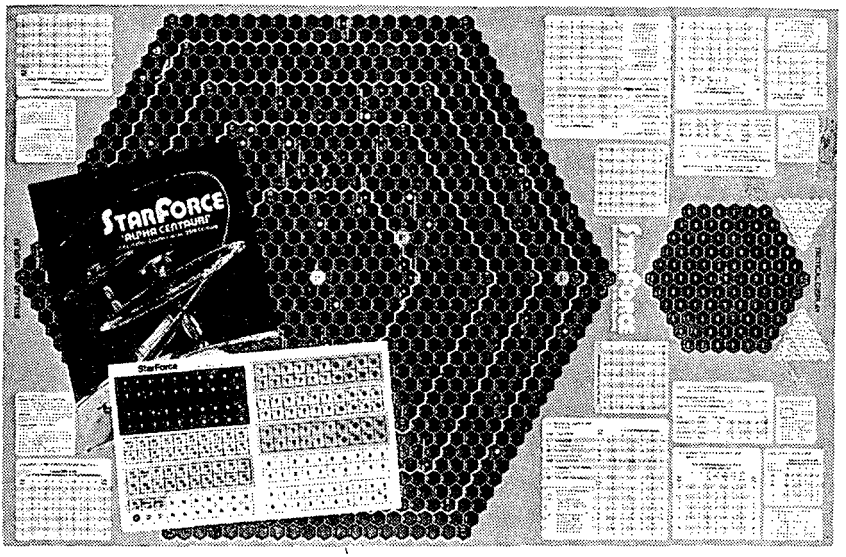

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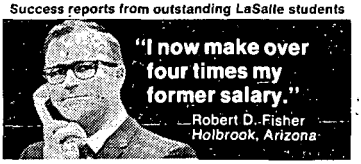

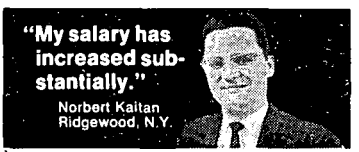

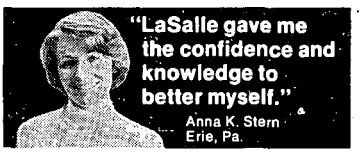

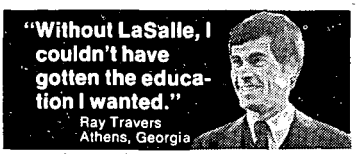

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